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An essay on native depravity

Rev. Samuel Miller, D.D.

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NATIVE DEPRAVITY.

Sam. L. Miller.

AN

ESSAY

ON

NATIVE DEPRAVITY.

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NOTICE.

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ESSAY
ON
NATIVE DEPRAVITY.

CHAPTER I.

Preliminary Remarks.

THE following remarks are intended to guard against wrong modes of reasoning, and to prepare the way for a just and profitable discussion of the subject.

First. The consideration of the divine character cannot be made the ground of any presumption against the doctrine of human sinfulness, and can have no influence to invalidate the arguments by which the doctrine is supported.

In reasoning on the present subject I shall proceed on the principle, that the existence and moral per-

fection of God have been satisfactorily proved, and are unhesitatingly believed; and that he is a righteous and benevolent Governour. My position is, that this cannot be adduced as proof against the doctrine of man's apostacy and ruin.

✓ No man can urge the moral character of God as an argument against the doctrine of man's depravity, except upon the supposition, that we are competent to determine, by our own reason, in what manner God's moral perfection will be developed. If we make an appeal to revelation or experience, we shall find what all Christians, and what the most enlightened of the heathen, have found and acknowledged; that man is the subject of a deep moral depravity. But suppose that we were now at the period immediately after the creation of man, and that, with our rational powers in full exercise, we should look upon the innocent, happy pair in the garden of Eden, under the inspection of their Creator, and enjoying his constant kindness. And suppose the inquiry should be made; "*Will these holy and happy beings ever become transgressors of God's righteous law? Will God suffer them to fall into sin? And will their posterity have their existence in a state of moral ruin?*" — What would be the proper answer to such an inquiry? — the answer which would accord with the truth? We might be inclined to say, such a disastrous event can never take place. God is infinitely good, and he

will watch over his dependent, feeble creatures, and effectually guard them against all danger, especially against the pollution and ruin of sin. But if we should wait a little, and observe the course of events, we should learn that our judgment was premature. We should see the happy parents of the human race fallen into a state of guilt, and, through their offence, all their posterity "*constituted sinners*." And thus the history of God's providence would teach us, that we were not of ourselves competent to determine, in what particular manner his infinite perfections would be displayed.

The fact is, that the goodness of God is, in various respects, immensely different from all that we call goodness in man. And if we should undertake to determine, in particular cases, that such and such acts will result from the *divine* goodness, because similar acts result from such goodness as *we* possess; we should fall into the most hurtful mistakes. Our proceeding in this manner would be to assume the principle, that we can measure the infinite perfections of God by our own views and feelings. It would be to forget that, while we are of yesterday and know nothing, the mind of God is infinite;—that, while our views are confined within a very narrow compass, the mind of God comprehends the whole extent of the universe, and reaches through everlasting ages. Nothing can be more reasonable, than to believe

that the divine wisdom and goodness, which are infinite, and which have respect to the whole system of the creation, and to the whole of a coming eternity, must dictate measures exceedingly diverse from those which our finite minds would be likely to adopt.

This general principle is of special use in regard to a great variety of subjects, especially with regard to the one now under consideration. We are to make no inference from the moral perfection of God, which will interfere with our belief of man's depravity. We are utterly unable to determine, from our notions of the divine goodness, whether all or any human beings will be transgressors, or in what degree they will be depraved, or at what period of their existence, or in what manner, their depravity will commence. Facts show, and the Scriptures show, that many things are consistent with the goodness of God, which, judging from our own reason, we should have thought wholly inconsistent. We are to remember this; and to come to the inquiry, *what is the moral state of man?* with a mind free from prepossession, ready to believe what is proved by proper evidence, and with a full persuasion that, whatever we find to be fact as to the existence, the degree, the commencement, or the consequences, of depravity in man, must be perfectly consistent with the moral attributes of God. Accordingly, the consideration that God is infinitely benevolent, can have no more influence upon our inquiry respecting

man's moral character and state, than respecting the natural faculties of his mind, or his bodily senses. The subject must be treated wholly as a matter of fact.

This principle will entirely free us from one of the most perplexing difficulties respecting the reality and the degree of human corruption. If we take care to understand this important principle, and to have it fixed in our minds, we shall no longer deny that man is dead in sin, *because God is good*. It will no longer appear to us any stain upon the character of God, that a world of rational, moral beings have rebelled against him, and exposed themselves to his wrath. Feeling ourselves utterly incompetent to judge what would be suitable for a Being of infinite perfection to do in such a case, we shall take the attitude of learners; and, as soon as we find what God has actually done, and what he has not done,—what events have occurred among his creatures, and how he treats those events, we shall be satisfied. Indeed, we shall be so far from thinking anything which takes place among created beings incompatible with the perfections of God, that we shall regard all his arrangements and operations, especially in the moral world, as manifestations of his attributes, and as means of giving us just conceptions of his character. And as to his works,—if, in any case, even where we find the greatest mystery, the question arises, *why has God done so?* we can

readily answer, *because he sees it to be right*. This general answer, which arises altogether from our confidence in the infinite wisdom and goodness of God, should be perfectly satisfactory, even though the particular, specific reasons of his conduct lie wholly beyond the sphere of our intelligence.

Secondly. No objection to the doctrine of human depravity can be derived from the fact, *that God created man at first in his own moral image*. In other words, *the doctrine of man's original holiness is not inconsistent with the doctrine of his present sinfulness*.

Man, from the very constitution of his nature, was finite and mutable. Though he was created holy, he was liable to become unholy. He had no such inflexibility of principle, no such strength of character, no such confirmation in virtue, as absolutely to secure him against sin. His certain perseverance in holiness could not then be inferred from anything in himself. He was in his nature changeable, and was exposed to temptations which might influence him to become a sinner.

There was, therefore, no certain ground of his continuance in a state of holiness, *unless God saw fit to afford him certain preservation*. And, as we have already remarked, it could in no way be inferred from God's moral perfection, that he would preserve man from sin. He was under no obligation to do it.

He would violate none of his perfections by not doing it.

Thus the matter stood. Man, as a moral agent, in a state of trial, might fall into sin. He was liable to change, and was exposed to the influence of causes, which might induce him to change. God was not pledged to preserve him from falling into sin, and none of his perfections required him to afford such preservation. And there might be special reasons relating to his own glory and the interests of his moral kingdom, why he should not effectually preserve him. When, therefore, sin occurred, we cannot say there was anything incredible in it, or anything inconsistent with man's having been originally holy. And his original holiness cannot be mentioned as diminishing at all the evidence of his apostacy, or as presenting any obstacle in the way of believing it. Difficulties may exist, and difficulties not to be solved, respecting this matter. But what has now been stated is plain truth; and we ought to remember it; namely, that man, though at first holy, was changeable, and was exposed to the influence of circumstances, which might induce him to sin; and that, as there is evidence that he actually sinned, we are to admit the fact without hesitation, and can never consider it as incredible, that a moral agent, in a state of probation, should transgress the divine law and fall under its penalty.

Thirdly. The chief reason which prevents men from rightly understanding and receiving the doctrine of human corruption, is, *their blindness to the excellence of the divine law, and their ignorance of their own hearts.*

The moral law is the standard of character. If we are conformed to its requisitions, we are holy ; if not conformed, we are sinners. But men in general have no proper discernment of this perfect law, and no practical regard to it, as the rule of their actions. Their eyes are directed to other and very different standards, according to which they can think highly of themselves, though in truth they are guilty and vile. Every human being is in himself an example of depravity. And he must learn its nature and malignity by a careful survey of his own heart and life. While he neglects to examine himself, and to judge of his moral feelings and actions by God's holy law, arguments from Scripture and experience will fail to convince him of the truth, or at best will give him only an intellectual conviction, a dry, speculative notion of what his heart does not feel. Here is the great hinderance to the reception of that humiliating doctrine which we hold respecting the moral corruption and ruin of the human race. Men are occupied with other concerns and do not look into themselves. Or if at any time they do this, they disregard the only true standard of moral actions, and the only just measure

of their obligations, and substitute another standard, which leads them to overlook their moral delinquencies and the utter alienation of their hearts from God, and to form an opinion of themselves which will gratify their self-love, and free them from the pain of self-reproach. They are like a man who, having a deformed countenance, induces a painter to make such a picture of him as shall conceal his deformities, and please his vanity by imaginary beauties, and then looks at it as a true picture of himself.

The fact that most men reject the doctrine of human depravity and guilt, or form so very inadequate and erroneous a conception of it, is so far from being a confutation of the doctrine, that it is in reality a striking illustration of its truth.

Fourthly. It is in no degree inconsistent with the doctrine of depravity, as set forth in the Scriptures, and as maintained by evangelical Christians, that *men in their natural state possess and exhibit many amiable, commendable and useful qualities.*

Men stand in various relations. Their character must of course be viewed in a variety of lights, and in each must be estimated according as it is conformed or not to the rules of conduct arising from these various relations. They may have attributes corresponding to some of these relations, such as the natural relations of domestic and social life ; and in reference to these rela-

tions merely, they may be considered both amiable and useful, and even praise-worthy; while they have nothing which corresponds to the high relation they bear to God and to his spiritual law, and to their fellow men as subjects of that law. Accordingly the natural affections of parents and children, and what are commonly called the social affections and sympathies, are just as consistent as bodily appetites are, with the fact that man is without holiness, i. e. without that affection which is required of him in relation to God and a moral government. What then becomes of all that the deniers of human corruption have said of the lovely simplicity, the freedom from guile, the dutifulness and affection of children, and the sympathy, good will, gratitude, justice, and generosity which men in their natural state often exhibit. It is admitted that they may have all these lovely and useful and commendable dispositions, and that, in regard to all the common domestic and social relations, those who have these dispositions are to be regarded in a very different light from those who are destitute of them. But, after all, these natural dispositions, however amiable, and however useful their fruits, do not touch their relation to God, and to the immortal beings who compose his moral kingdom. And, for aught that appears, they may be as really destitute of that holy love and obedience, which is due from them in this paramount relation, as if they had nothing which corresponded to their other relations.

I say they may be as *really destitute of holiness*. I speak not of the degree of positive wickedness. For doubtless the extinction of the natural affections shows an extreme degree of depravity. Indeed, there is nothing but the practice of wickedness for a long time and with uncommon violence, which can extinguish the amiable and useful dispositions belonging to us as domestic and social beings. Accordingly, when the apostle speaks of persons as "without natural affections," his object evidently is, to describe those who are sunk to the lowest degree of vice. To sum up all in a few words; the natural affections, however cultivated and improved, and however attractive the forms in which they may be exhibited, do not constitute holiness, and are often found where no degree of holiness exists. Indeed they are so deeply rooted in the nature of man, that they cannot be eradicated, except by the influence of extreme wickedness, nor always even by this.

My last remark is, that *no theory intended to account philosophically for the fact that man is depraved, can free the subject from difficulty*.

As I shall enlarge upon this view of the subject in another place, I shall treat it briefly here. It will be found, I think, on careful inquiry, that the common belief of the orthodox relative to the doctrine of depravity, is exposed to no greater objections than any other belief; that all the attempts which have been

made by philosophical reasoning to avoid or even to diminish the difficulties attending the subject, have effected but little ; and that man's universal sinfulness is, after all, left as it was, a *well known, dreadful fact, — a fact, whether explained or unexplained, as certain as our existence.* Now as no hypothesis which has been invented for the purpose of accounting for man's depravity, and freeing it from objections and difficulties, has answered the purpose ; are we not brought to this conclusion ; that *depravity is a fact which chiefly concerns us not in an intellectual, but in a moral view ; that we are to make use of the doctrine for practical purposes, and that it is the part of Christian wisdom to receive those particular views of the subject which best agree with the current representations of Scripture, and with what experience and observation dictate, to whatever speculative objections those views may be exposed.*

I have said this for the purpose of clearing the way, and making the object of inquiry as simple and plain as it is in other branches of knowledge. In physical science we inquire for facts ; for example, we inquire whether all bodies have a tendency to the centre of the earth, or to the centre of the solar system ; how this tendency shows itself, and according to what laws it is regulated. We inquire, what peculiar tendency or power the loadstone has, and in what

manner it operates. The same in every branch of natural science. Here we suffer ourselves to be encumbered with no hypothesis and no preconceived opinion. And if any one should say to us, this or that thing, which is made known as a fact, is very strange and unaccountable, entirely different from what we should have supposed, and liable to difficulties which cannot be solved ; it would still be of no avail. We should be satisfied with clear evidence, and should unhesitatingly believe the truth of facts, made known by our own experience or that of others. What if they should appear strange and unaccountable, and should be attended with insolvable difficulties ? To creatures who are just beginning to learn, everything may be strange and unaccountable. We know that many things with which we are familiar, and concerning which we have no difficulties, are very strange and attended with insurmountable difficulties to a little child ; and that they were formerly so to us.

What a pity it is that men cannot be brought to exercise as much reason and common sense on the subject of religion, as they do on other subjects ! In every department of natural science, they readily admit *facts*, however new and however contrary to their preconceived opinions. But when they come to the subject of religion, on which they are least of all capable of knowing anything except what God teaches them, they hesitate to admit what the word of God

and common experience make perfectly plain and certain. They doubt and even deny a doctrine which rests upon obvious facts, occurring around them and within them every day and hour of their lives. What can be done to convince men of the unreasonableness and folly of such a course, and to prepare them to receive with simplicity whatever God makes known to them as truth ?

CHAPTER II.

General remarks on the evidence of depravity arising from human conduct.—
Scripture proof of the universality of sin.

It may be proper to commence the argument in support of the common doctrine of depravity, by a few general remarks on the evidence which arises from *human conduct*.

This is a kind of evidence which is sanctioned by our Saviour himself. “By their fruits ye shall know them. Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles?—A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.” On this principle we ground all our judgments of ourselves and others. External actions are the only evidence of character which can fall under our observation, in respect to *our fellow men*. And external and internal actions furnish the proper evidence of our own character.

Now the general current of human actions is such in regard to the divine law, as to afford conclusive and overwhelming evidence of man’s moral corruption. If

we turn our thoughts to the history of human conduct in the antediluvian world, and since, we shall see that *man has been a sinner*. If we survey the conduct of man at the present day, in every situation and at every period of life, we still find evidence of the fact that *man is a sinner*. And this fact is made still more evident to each individual by his own moral feelings and actions. Who among men, who among the wisest and best of men, can survey his own life, even for a single day, without being constrained to feel that *man is a sinner*? Or if a doubt should be felt in his mind respecting the sinfulness of *some other men*, could he be in doubt respecting his *own* sinfulness? Every one who attends seriously to his own inward exercises and outward actions, and compares them with the standard of God's law, must acknowledge that, whoever may be free from guilt, *he himself is a sinner*.

The evidence which arises from human conduct in favor of the common doctrine of depravity, is *exceedingly various*. It is exhibited in all conceivable ways. Indeed the wickedness of the human heart has forced itself out in ways which, had it not been for our knowledge of facts, we should have pronounced impossible.

This evidence exists in *a very high degree*. The actions of men are not such that we are merely able, by careful examination, to discover some taint of moral

evil in them. They have an obliquity which is palpable and prominent. They have a deep stain, like scarlet and crimson.

The evidence from human conduct is *constantly exhibited before our eyes*. Should we at any time forget the history of past ages, and begin to think that man is not so depraved as has generally been supposed; we should soon be awakened from our dream, by the fruits of depravity in those around us, and especially in ourselves. Whether we are associated with our fellow creatures in the common business of life or in the concerns of religion, we cannot fail to witness in them, whoever they may be, clear indications of moral corruption. And if we are separated from the society of men and live in solitude, we shall still have evidence of this corruption from what takes place in ourselves. Wherever we may go and whatever we may do, this evidence will be continually present with us.

From the history of human conduct, we have then evidence of depravity, which is various, powerful, and constant. Indeed the evidence is so great, that it is difficult to imagine how it could be increased. There is, it is true, an effort among men, and we may often be conscious of such an effort in ourselves, to draw a veil over the naked deformity of sin, and to put on the semblance of goodness when the reality is wanting.

But even this affords additional evidence of the sinfulness which cleaves to our character. Deceit, or an unwillingness to appear what it is, must be regarded as one of the most hateful properties of the depraved heart. And the more we are in the habit of searching out the deceitful workings of sin, and the various false refuges which it invents, the more deep will be our conviction of its power and malignity. Is it not then difficult to conceive, how the evidence of man's depravity, arising from his actions, could be increased? It is, to say the least, so great, that we must be the subjects of singular obstinacy and blindness, not to be convinced, and of singular pride, not to be humbled.

The evidence already brought into view, even if there was no other, proves the moral depravity of man as clearly, as the evidence of facts prove any principle in natural science. Even the law of gravitation cannot be proved more certainly than "*the law of sin*" in man. If the law of gravitation is proved by the fact that all bodies, when left without resistance, show a tendency to move towards the centre of the earth; the moral depravity of man is proved by the fact that, when left to himself in circumstances which lead to a developement of his moral character, he always shows a propensity to sin. The appearances of human nature from the first apostacy to the present time, and from early childhood to old age, evince the existence

of a deep-rooted moral disease. That the nature of man has a wrong bias, or tends to evil, is seen and acknowledged by all who have the care of children and youth, or who seriously endeavour to persuade men to conform to the rule of duty. It is proved by all the restraints which discreet parents feel themselves obliged to impose on their children, and rulers upon their subjects; especially by those restraints which good men find it necessary to impose upon themselves. The facts which indicate the existence of moral evil in man, are as various and clear, as those which ever indicated any bodily disease.

I would just add, that the more perfect our acquaintance with the conduct of men, and especially our own conduct, the deeper will be our impression of the corruption of human nature. It is not like a case in which a partial acquaintance with the symptoms of the disease excites fears which are allayed by a more perfect acquaintance. It is rather like a case in which our first observation might lead us to apprehend that a person is the subject of some infirmity, still however leaving us in doubt whether there is any *serious* disorder, or what the disorder is, but our continued observation of the symptoms gradually increases our apprehension, and finally makes it a certainty that the patient has a disorder of the most alarming character, and incapable of being cured, except by the speedy application of extraordinary means.

Depravity Universal.

The evidence from Scripture *that all men are sinners*, will now be considered. And it should be kept in mind that this evidence is nothing less than the testimony of that Being who perfectly knows what is in man; who is no respecter of persons, and who is perfectly qualified to be our Judge. It is the testimony of a benevolent Creator respecting his creatures, and of a holy and merciful Father respecting his children. In such a testimony we may be sure there will be no partiality and no injustice.

The particulars of the divine testimony in proof of the universal sinfulness of our race, will be presented in the following order :

1. Passages *expressly asserting* the universality of sin.
2. Passages setting forth the sinful conduct of *individuals* and *nations*.
3. Representations of other subjects which *imply* the universal sinfulness of man.

1. Passages *expressly asserting* the universality of sin.

Those which are found in the writings of the Apostle Paul, are very direct. Rom. 5: 12—19. “And so death passed upon *all men, for that all have sinned.*” The

passage clearly implies that all who die are sinners, or that the sinfulness of men extends as far as their mortality. A variety of expressions follow this, showing that all the posterity of Adam are in a state of sin and ruin. This is repeatedly affirmed in ch. iii: "We have before proved," says the Apostle, "that both Jews and Gentiles are *all* under sin; as it is written: There is none righteous, no, not one. There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way; they are together become unprofitable, there is none that doeth good, no, not one." He then comes to the conclusion, that "all the world are guilty before God; so that by the deeds of the law no flesh can be justified in his sight;" which would not be true, if any were free from sin.

The declaration of God by the prophet Jeremiah, [ch. 17: 9,] conveys the same sentiment. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" The sense is unlimited. It is not the heart of *one man*, or of *one society of men*; but *the heart*,—*the human heart universally*. This sense is confirmed by the next verse. "I the Lord search *the heart*;" *the heart universally*. And as there can be no limitation in this case, there can be none in the former. The heart which God searches, is that which is deceitful and desperately wicked. In Eccl. 9: 4, we find a similar expression: "The heart of the sons of men is full of evil." So, Gen. 8: 21;

"The imagination of *man's heart* is evil from his youth." What does the anatomist mean, when he gives a description of the form and uses of *the heart*, as a part of the human body? And what does the writer on mental philosophy mean, when he speaks of *the mind, the understanding, the will, and the conscience*? Does not the form of expression always denote that what is said relates to man *as a species*, and is true of the species *universally*, unless there is an express or implied limitation? But it may be said, there *is* such a limitation, inasmuch as the same writers who declare *that all are sinners, all corrupt,—that there is none that seeketh after God, or doeth good, no, not one*, also speak frequently of those who are *righteous*, of those who *seek God and do good*.

To set this matter right, we have only to make the Bible its own interpreter. How does the sacred volume account for the fact, that there are some who form an exception to the general character of man, and, in the midst of a wicked world, are holy and obedient? Does it teach that they are so *by nature*? No. It unequivocally ascribes the character of those who are holy, *to the new creating influence of the Divine Spirit*. They were "by nature children of wrath, even as others." But they are "*born again*;" they "*are washed, they are justified, they are sanctified* in the name of the Lord Jesus, and *by the Spirit of their God*." They are what they are, "*by the*

grace of God." Now if they were holy by nature, the texts which declare that there is none righteous, would evidently be subject to limitation. But as those who are holy, are not so in their natural state, and become so only by the renewing of the Holy Ghost, they furnish no exception to the universal sinfulness of man, as he is by nature. Whatever men may become, in this world or in the next, by redeeming, sanctifying grace, they are all, in their natural state, without exception, *dead in sin*. And it is not to be forgotten that even those who are holy and obedient, are so only in a very imperfect measure, having much remaining sin. So that if any say they have no sin, "they deceive themselves," and "make God a liar."

2. I argue from those texts which set forth the sinfulness of individuals and nations at particular times. Such as Gen. 6: 5; "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." This passage shows what was the character of the human race before the flood. "The wickedness of man was great." To the same class belong all the passages which describe the impiety and wickedness of Jews and Gentiles at different periods. These passages are very numerous, and are found in the writings of Moses and the Prophets, in the Psalms and in the New Testament.

It is indeed said, in the way of objection to the common mode of reasoning from such texts, that they relate to men in particular places and at particular times, and to those who were subjects of an uncommon degree of depravity, and that it would be very unjust to understand them as descriptive of the character of the whole human race.

This objection can be obviated by considering the manner in which the subject is treated by writers in the New Testament. They refer to the account given in the Old Testament, of the depravity of men in former times, as *descriptive of the character of the human race generally*. The prophet Isaiah said: "Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" And in Isaiah vi, God said to the prophet: "Go, and tell this people; hear ye indeed but understand not, and see ye indeed but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes." In this commission God signified what was the character of the people to whom the prophet was sent, and pointed out the fearful effect which his ministry would have upon them. The words related, *primarily and directly*, to those who were contemporary with the prophet Isaiah. But in the New Testament, these words are repeatedly referred to as descriptive of the character of *the Jews under the Gospel dispensation*.

Take the following instances. John 12: 37 — 40; “But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not; that the saying of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake; *Lord, who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?* Therefore they could not believe, because that Isaiah saith again; *He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.*” Thus the writer of the evangelical history took two passages which described the stupidity and wickedness of the Jews, at a former period, and applied them to those who were contemporary with him. The Apostle Paul did the same to the Jews in Rome. In his final address to them, in order to make a deep impression of their guilt, he said; “Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto your fathers;” — repeating the same words from Isaiah vi, with the manifest and cutting implication, that the words described *their* character, as well as the character of their fathers. In his epistle to Titus, Paul, in the same way, takes a passage from the poet Epimenides, and applies it to the Cretans of his day. “One of them, even a prophet of their own, said: *The Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, slow bel-lies.* This witness is true: wherefore rebuke them

sharply, &c.” The passage from the poet not only suggested that the Cretans were depraved, but that they were characterized from age to age by *particular forms* of depravity. But the example of the Apostle in Romans iii, is most directly in point. In making out the proof that all men are sinners, he enumerates the several forms of wickedness which had been exhibited by men in particular places, and at particular times. The argument is unquestionably good. And of course, it is just and proper for us to regard all the particular instances of wickedness which the history of any portion of mankind brings to view, as indicating what is *the common character of the species*. In several of the Psalms, particularly the v, x, xiv, xxxvi, and xl, and in Isaiah lix, the writers described the sins which prevailed in their day. “They are corrupt, they have done abominable works; they are all gone aside,” &c. The passages are indeed descriptive of the Jewish character in times of great degeneracy. But the Apostle makes use of these very passages to set forth the character of the Jews in his day. And indeed he fails as to the great object of his reasoning, and the conclusion at which he arrives is false, if the passages he quotes from the Old Testament do not contain, substantially, a true account of the character of *mankind universally* in their natural state. For he adduces the passages for the very purpose of proving that all the world are guilty before God. It is a connected

chain of reasoning ; and unless the texts cited are, as to the substance of them, justly applicable to the whole race of man, the reasoning is without force, and the conclusion, that all are guilty and in need of salvation by grace, is broader than the premises. But when depravity is thus predicated of all men alike, it by no means implies that all have the same *degree*, or exhibit the same *forms* of depravity. This was not the case even with those of whom the Psalmist and the prophet Isaiah originally spoke. The truth of the passages quoted, and the propriety of reasoning from them as the Apostle does, need not be supposed to imply more than this, namely, that all men in their natural state are unholy and disobedient, and so, as to wickedness of heart, are substantially alike ; or that they have *the same moral nature, the same wrong propensities, the same elements of moral evil* ; and that the variety of characters existing among men is not to be accounted for by any essential difference as to moral nature, but by their different bodily constitutions, by the different circumstances in which they are placed, and the different influences under which they act.

It may possibly be thought that, as the passages quoted related to the Jewish nation in former times, the Apostle meant to apply them merely to those Jews *who had a similar character in his time*, and that it would be improper to consider them as a proof of uni-

versal depravity. I admit that the primary design of the passages related to Jews; but the Apostle shows that his argument was meant to have a wider range. His conclusion is, that "the whole world," whether Jews or Gentiles, are guilty, that is, *convicted of sin*, and so must look for justification by grace, not by works. I would not deny, that in coming to this conclusion he might refer to what he had said to the Gentiles in ch. i, in connection with what he had said of the Jews in ch. iii. Nor would I deny that he might take it for granted, and as what would not be called in question by those to whom he wrote, that the Gentiles were as wicked as the Jews, and as worthy of the charges which he recited from the Old Testament. On this ground, his making good his charge against the *Jews*, was, by obvious consequence, making it good against the *Gentiles*.

If any should allege that the passages quoted were meant by the Apostle to be applied only to the *unbelieving* and *ungodly* part of the Jewish nation; my reply is, that the Apostle's design was to show, that there is only one mode of acceptance with God, namely, by faith in Christ, in contradistinction to salvation by works. And was it not true of *believers*, as well as of others, that there was no way of justification for them except by grace? Had they not *been* sinners? And were they not sinners still? Does not the Apostle, in the next chapter, speak of Abraham and David,

as those who were justified in the gratuitous way, that is, pardoned; — implying, that they were transgressors? So that what the Apostle here asserts of all men, is not to be limited to the unbelieving and ungodly, but is to be considered as justly applicable to all who were *ever* in a state of sin, that is, to the whole race of man, without exception; as he says, verse 23, “for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God,” — and so need the grace of the Gospel.

There can be no reasonable doubt, therefore, that the passages quoted in Romans iii, from the Old Testament, are a true description of the character which, for substance, all men naturally possess. These passages show that, whatever may be the different forms of character among men, they all, without exception, agree in this, that they are sinners. And if these passages are to be regarded in this light; it is evidently proper that other similar passages should be regarded in the same light. Accordingly, the account given of the wickedness of the antediluvian world, and of particular portions of mankind in different ages, may be produced as a true exhibition of the natural character of man, a developement, varied by circumstances, but *substantially* the same, of man’s unrenewed heart. What if men, who are educated in a Christian land, and under the influence of Christian instruction, are free from the odious forms of vice described by the Apostle? Are they not “by nature children of wrath

even as others?" In forming a correct judgment of their case, we pass by what is fair and lovely in their visible conduct;—we pass by all the diversities of their intellectual and social qualities, and fix our eye upon the moral affections of the heart. In these elements of evil all agree. And although they have not, by formal outward acts, committed theft, murder, &c., they all have in their unrenewed hearts what may be called the *principles* or *seeds* of these hateful vices. And admitting them to be alike in these original affections, we can satisfactorily account for all the varieties of character existing among them, by the influence of circumstances. Who can suppose that the different degrees of wickedness, and all the varieties of character among men, are to be traced back to a difference in their moral nature, or their original moral dispositions? Nothing could be more unreasonable, or contrary to the word of God, than this. It is clearly suggested by common observation and experience, and especially by Scripture, that human nature, as to its grand moral features, is always the same; and that the wickedness committed in any age or country, is a true exhibition of what is in man as a species. Were it not so, the writings of historians, whether sacred or profane, would be of little use to us. We have been taught to regard it as one of the peculiar advantages of history, that it gives us lessons respecting human nature, or makes us acquainted with what is in man,

and so is calculated to profit us as individuals of the species. But of what advantage would history be to us, if it gave a description of the dispositions and actions of those who have no common nature with us, and to whom we bear no moral resemblance? On this supposition, why did the Apostle John refer to the conduct of Cain, for the purpose of counselling and warning those to whom he wrote? Why did the Apostle Paul say, "Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning?" And why did he bring into view the ingratitude, unbelief, murmuring, and obduracy of the Israelites in the wilderness, for the purpose of admonition to his contemporaries? Suppose men in former times were chargeable with various kinds of wickedness; what is that to us, if we have no tendency in our nature to the same wickedness? History has been regarded as a faithful mirror in which we may discern the features of our own character, even those which were before unobserved, and may learn the dangers against which we ought to guard. But on the supposition above made, history could no longer be used for these important purposes, but must be considered merely as a gratification to our curiosity. Nay more, those texts in which the sacred writers make the most general declarations respecting the sinfulness of man, must be limited to those to whom the writers originally applied them. If they said "that which was born of the flesh is flesh," and

that "they who are in the flesh cannot please God;" they must have said it of the carnal race of men who lived at that time; but it by no means proves that men at the present day are in this condition. If Christ declared that "except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of heaven," — and if the Apostles spoke of all Christians as actually renewed by the Divine Spirit; we cannot, upon this principle, consider such passages as intended to show what the natural state of man is, and what is necessary to the Christian character, at this period of superior light and refinement. Indeed, if the principle involved in the objection is correct, we cannot conclude that any Scripture precept is obligatory on us. For all the commands of God contained in the Bible, were given to men who lived in former times. And how can those commands, which were given to generations of men long since passed away, show what God requires of *us*? Those who were spoken to by Moses and the Prophets, and by Christ and the Apostles, were required to repent of sin, and to love God with all their hearts, and their neighbours as themselves. But when has the inspired teacher said, that these requisitions related to men who should live in the nineteenth century? In fact, all parts of the Bible were addressed to men of other times and in other circumstances; and how can any of its doctrines be applicable to us? How can its precepts bind us? And how can its promises animate and comfort us?

All the good which the sacred volume can now do, is to teach us what mankind were, and how God treated them in former times. To all these extremities should we be carried, if we should admit the supposition which we have been considering. For the same principle which would free us from the high charges of depravity and guilt found in the Bible, would authorize us to set aside all the other doctrines connected with that of human corruption, — would prove us to be free from the obligations of all the precepts of the Bible, and would entirely deprive us of its gracious and cheering promises. And so the sacred volume would be to us an antiquated, obsolete, and useless book.

I well know it is maintained by all sober men, that the general instructions, and precepts, and promises of God's word, relate to us as really as to those who lived in the time of the Prophets and Apostles. But on what principle are they to be so understood? How is it that we directly conclude, that all men now living are bound by the moral precepts contained in the Bible? — that wherever we find human beings, we feel it to be proper at once to address to them the offers and the promises of the Gospel, and to call upon them to repent and believe? It can be on no other principle than this; that as to whatever is necessary to constitute accountable beings, and as to the essential qualities of moral character, all men are alike. This is a principle which

we almost instinctively admit. Who doubts that the human beings whom he meets for the first time, even if it be in the most distant part of the world, have the same rational and moral faculties with those men whom he has familiarly known; that they possess, and will, as occasion prompts, exhibit, self-love, pride, a disposition to resent injuries, and all the other moral affections which he is conscious of in himself, or has witnessed in others around him? And who does not feel it to be proper and necessary in all his intercourse with men, whether familiarly known to him or not, to act on the principle that they are subject to all the depraved affections which the inspired teachers charged upon the wicked world in their day? If a man should act on any other principle, he would be considered as deficient in the knowledge of human nature. And if any one should think his own heart free from that depravity which has misguided and ruined others, he would show that he is ignorant of himself.

This leads me to say, that the propriety of considering the description of human sinfulness found in the Bible, as of universal application, is evident from the experience and consciousness of every sober, reflecting man. Let such a man read what the sacred writers affirm of the wickedness of individuals and of nations; and then look into his own heart, and ponder well the emotions which have been excited and the principles which have operated there; and must he not be satis-

fied that he has within him, the elements of all that the Apostles and Prophets charged upon the wicked world? Nay, it will not be difficult for him to discover in himself a real moral resemblance to those who have been stigmatized by the most hateful vices.

I appeal to those who have been accustomed to look into their own hearts. You know a man who is guilty of a heinous crime, — theft, adultery, or murder; and you know all the unpropitious circumstances of his case from early childhood; the wrong instruction he has received, the corrupting manners of his associates, the influence of wealth or poverty, of excessive indulgence, or irritating severity, which has operated upon him, — yea, the whole combination of hurtful causes by which his moral faculties have been perverted, and his heart prepared for acts of wickedness. Now had *you* been placed in the same circumstances, would you not have been likely to commit the same crime? Have you not already, in many instances, done that which is equally contrary to the divine law? And have you not a painful consciousness of those unholy dispositions, which, had there been no influence to subdue or restrain them, and had they been elicited and strengthened by temptation, might have made you a Cain, a Pharaoh, a Saul, or a Judas? Are you not convinced that you have in yourself the elements of the same moral deformity? and that it is owing, not to the natural purity of your hearts, but to the

influence of the Divine Spirit, or to the restraints of Divine Providence, that you are not actually numbered with the most vile and wretched of the human race?

3. I argue from those representations of Scripture which teach the depravity of all the human race *by manifest implication*.

Those passages which teach the necessity of regeneration, or which assert that the obedient and pious have been regenerated, clearly imply that all men are naturally in a depraved state. For, if any human being is not depraved, surely he does not need to be born again. He is holy and obedient without regeneration.

The first passage I shall quote is John 3: 1—7, containing the discourse of our Saviour with Nicodemus. The four thousand years which had passed away from the creation, had furnished abundant evidence of the natural character of man. A thorough experiment had been made of the disposition of the human heart in a great variety of circumstances. Commands and warnings, promises and threats, favors and judgments, displays of wonderful mercy and of tremendous wrath, had been repeatedly tried. Jesus stood upon an eminence from which he witnessed the whole developement which had been made of human nature, and all the affections of man's heart. And he set forth the grand result,—the momentous truth

which the history of all ages had taught, and which, without the history of past ages, was perfectly manifest to his heart-searching eye, when he said to Nicodemus; “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, *except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*” It is evident that the change here spoken of, is a moral or spiritual change; because it is to prepare men for a spiritual kingdom. And it is necessary for all men, *Εαν μη τις*, etc. “Except *any one* is born again.” No human being, who is not regenerated, can enjoy the blessedness of Christ’s kingdom. And so it is most clearly implied, that every human being is in a state of moral depravity, which renders him unfit for Christ’s kingdom. To illustrate the necessity of a spiritual renovation, our Saviour added, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh.” This implies that the children of men are the subjects of such sinful propensities as render them incapable of holy enjoyment. And as this state of depravity is the direct and certain consequence of our natural birth, it of course belongs alike to all. The various places where the duty of repentance is enjoined, or the necessity of it asserted, imply the same doctrine. For how can repentance be regarded as the duty of men, or as necessary to their salvation, unless they are sinners?

The sinfulness of all mankind is implied in the work of redemption, particularly the death of Christ

and the dispensation of the Spirit. The reasoning of the Apostle is, that "if Christ died for all, then were all dead," i. e. dead in sin. If any of our race were not sinners, they would need no atonement, and Christ's death could have no relation to them; for he is everywhere represented as having died for *sinners*, the just for the *unjust*. Redemption by the blood of Christ, for those who are free from sin, would be totally incongruous. The same is true as to the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is sent to convince men of sin, to quicken them, to make them holy, to shed abroad the love of God in their hearts. But what need of all this, nay, what place for it, in regard to those who are not sinners? Unless the heart is impure, what occasion is there for purification? Unless the mind is darkened by sin, what occasion for special divine illumination? And unless man, in his natural state, is depraved, what necessity is there of his being renewed by divine influence? If then there is any being, who has no sin, he can have no concern with the special work of the Holy Spirit, and for him to ask for sanctifying influence, or for others to ask it for him, would be unreasonable and senseless.

The universality of sin is implied in the fact, that all men die. Death, including the dissolution of the body, is the penalty of the law. Natural death is a great and appalling evil, and when inflicted upon those who are the subjects of God's government, is a mani-

fest token of his displeasure. If men had been perfectly obedient and holy, they would not have suffered death. This is fully confirmed by the Apostle, in Rom. 5: 12; "By one man sin entered into the world, and *death by sin*; and so death hath passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Death came in as the result of sin, and extended as far as sin and no farther. The Apostle speaks, verse 14, of those who lived from Adam to Moses, and teaches that death reigned over them also, and consequently that they were sinners, though they had not sinned in the same manner that Adam did. The reasoning of the Apostle is perfectly clear, and the conclusion certain: *Death befalls all men; therefore they are all sinners.*

In proof of the universality of sin among men, I might say, that the fact has been acknowledged by all nations; that the structure of civil laws, and the administration of civil government, have always proceeded on the principle of human corruption; and that no government, whether civil or domestic, would be fitted to its end, or have any prospect of success, if it should overlook human corruption. I might say, too, that no man ever attempted in earnest to govern himself by the rules of right reason, without finding abundant and mortifying evidence of his own moral depravity, and that the farther any one goes in the work of a just self-government, the clearer will he find the evidence of "a law in his members warring against

the law of his mind," i. e. of a corrupt disposition of heart opposing his reason and conscience, and urging him to transgress the divine commands. The best men on earth have been sinners, and are the subjects of sin still. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

CHAPTER III.

Total depravity explained and proved.

Having shown that all men, without exception, are sinners, I shall next inquire, *what is the degree of sinfulness* which belongs to unrenewed man?

This is an inquiry entirely distinct from the preceding. For the fact that all are sinners, does not necessarily imply that they are sinful in any particular degree, and certainly not that they are totally sinful. We well know that all who are renewed are still the subjects of sin, though they have a degree of holiness.

The total depravity of man in his natural state, is to be considered altogether as a matter of fact; and to be proved by appropriate evidence. But before entering on the proof of the doctrine that man in his natural state is *totally sinful*, it will be important to obtain a clear and correct idea of the meaning of the doctrine.

Explanation of Total Depravity.

The doctrine relates to man as a *moral* being, subject to a moral government; and accordingly the depravity predicated of him is a *moral* depravity. And it is to be farther remarked that *moral*, in relation to this subject, is used in its highest sense. The word is not unfrequently applied to those affections which attend our domestic and social relations, and to the conduct which those affections prompt. Such affections, generally called natural affections, may indeed be regarded as of a moral nature in a secondary sense. They possess a higher excellence than the animal appetites, and more directly involve our moral interests. But the word *moral*, as commonly used with regard to the present subject, respects the high standard of God's holy law, the sum of which is, *to love God with all the heart, and our neighbour as ourselves*. So far as we are wanting in this affection for God, and our fellow men, and so far as we have an affection of a contrary kind, we are morally depraved. And if we are *entirely* destitute of the holy love required by God's law, and if all the affections we have in relation to that law are of an opposite nature, then we are *totally depraved*.

According to this view of the subject, the objection most frequently urged against the doctrine of total

depravity is manifestly without force. To disprove the doctrine, the objector alleges that men in general possess many amiable and useful qualities, and that very few go to that degree of wickedness which they are capable of reaching. We acknowledge the facts alleged, but deny that they are of any weight in opposition to the doctrine. The simple question is, whether a moderate degree of wickedness, and the existence of the amiable and useful qualities referred to, may consist with the entire absence of that holy love which God's law demands, and with the predominance of an opposite affection. If they may, then the facts alleged by the objector are not conclusive against the doctrine of total depravity. For the doctrine, properly explained, affirms only that man in his natural state has no holiness, and that the affections which he exercises, so far as they relate to the high standard of God's law, are wrong. The doctrine admits that man without regeneration may possess a great variety of dispositions, and perform a great variety of actions, which are lovely and important,—which are indeed what they ought to be, so far as they respect his domestic and social relations in the lower sense. But the doctrine asserts that, notwithstanding all these, unregenerated man has no holiness and is the subject of total moral depravity. And if any one thinks it best to use the word *moral*

in the lower sense, and to say, that the amiable natural affections above mentioned are morally good; it is sufficient for us to say, that in regard to this subject we use the word *moral* in a different sense.

It may perhaps appear strange and almost incredible to some, that so many estimable and lovely qualities should be found in those who are entirely without love to God. But it is a well known fact, that a high degree of domestic and social affection is often found in those who are most distant from religious principle. Besides, the natural affections manifestly relate to a different standard, have a different nature, and are designed for different purposes, from religious affection. They may therefore exist where this higher affection is wanting. That spiritual, holy love which God's law requires us to exercise towards our fellow men, does indeed imply the existence of love to God; and love to God implies love to men. It is so because the affection in both instances is of the same nature, and the exercise of it in both instances indicates the same state of mind.—Accordingly the second command is *like* to the first, and every one who loves his brother as the law requires, loves God also. But it is not so with the natural affections. We cannot say that every parent who has a tender natural affection for his offspring, has a holy affection for God; or that every

one who has a heart to sympathize with the afflicted, has a heart to feel for the interests of Christ's kingdom. The natural affections and sympathies have no more necessary connection with holiness, than the animal appetites; and it is as really contrary to fact, to say, *he that has natural affection loves God*, as to say, *he that has the appetite of hunger, loves God*. So our Saviour taught. To a youth, who possessed amiable sensibilities, attractive manners, and a fair character in the world's view, he said; "One thing thou lackest;" and that one thing was, *love to God*. That lovely youth idolized the world.

It ought to be remembered that we are as ready as those who entertain the laxest views of religion, to acknowledge the beauty and utility of those domestic and social qualities which naturally belong to man. But we are admonished by the word of God and by common observation not to put them in the place of religion.

The proof of the doctrine of total depravity is found in the representations of Scripture and in the consciousness of enlightened Christians.

There is indeed no text which affirms in so many words that *all men in their natural state are totally sinful*. But there are many texts which clearly imply this. Christ said to the unbelieving Jews; "I

know that ye have not the love of God in you:" and he even charged them with hating God.

All unbelievers, by not receiving Christ, give the same evidence of disaffection to God, as the unbelieving Jews did. And as it is a plain doctrine of the Bible that no one believes in Christ unless he is born of God, it follows that all the unrenewed have a heart to reject Christ, and of course that they are without love to God.

In accordance with this the Apostle says; "The carnal mind is enmity against God." By comparing this passage with John 3: 6, we learn that the carnal or fleshly mind is that which we have naturally. "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh." And as the carnal mind is thus the certain consequence of our natural birth, it of course belongs to all men. The only remaining question is, whether the enmity implied in the carnal mind, is exclusive of love. And of this there can be no reasonable doubt, as the Apostle says without qualification, that they who have the carnal mind, are in such a state that they cannot be subject to the law of God, and cannot please God; which would not be the case, if they had any degree of holy love.

The representation often made in Scripture that unconverted men are *dead in sin*, fairly implies that they are destitute of holiness. For holiness is spiritual

life. And if unrenewed sinners had any degree of this, they could hardly be said to be dead, and dead too in such a sense that they need to be quickened or made alive by supernatural power, according to the representation in Ephesians ii.

This leads me to say, that *the necessity of regeneration*, as asserted by our Saviour, (John iii,) is an obvious proof of man's total depravity. "Ye must be born again." "Except a man, [except *any one*] be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven." Why is such a change universally necessary, if men in their natural state have any degree of holiness? The Bible promises heaven to those who have holiness, or love to Christ, in any degree. Even one who gives a cup of cold water to Christ's disciples from a right motive, has the promise of a future reward. The existence of holiness in man is in Scripture attributed to *the renewing of the Holy Ghost*. In all its branches and in all its degrees, it is *the fruit of the Spirit*. It is perfectly obvious then that man, in his natural, unrenewed state, is wholly destitute of holiness, and that his moral affections are all sinful.

In support of our doctrine I might urge the failure of the most powerful motives to induce unrenewed man to turn from sin and believe in Christ. When the persuasive considerations of the Gospel are clearly presented before the mind of a sinner, they would

certainly influence him to the exercise of penitence, faith, and love, if he had any degree of moral rectitude. What could be a more decisive proof that his moral nature is entirely perverted, than the fact that the amiable and glorious character of Christ is held up before him, and yet excites no love; that when the condescending kindness and grace of God are described to him, he feels no gratitude; and that he renders no cordial obedience to that law which is holy, just, and good? What greater evidence of man's total moral corruption could there be than this, that he is not persuaded to forsake sin and follow Christ, either by the threat of eternal misery or the offer of eternal blessedness?

I appeal for proof, finally, to the experience and consciousness of the enlightened Christian. When he reflects upon the exercises of his own heart, and compares them with the demands of God's perfect law, he is satisfied that in him, naturally, there was no good thing, that he was wholly alienated from God, and that the first existence of holy affection in his heart was the fruit of regenerating grace. And he is equally satisfied that he is still dependent, and must continue to be dependent for all holy affections, upon the sanctifying influence of God's Spirit; and that, if that Holy Spirit should be wholly taken from him, he would sink at once into a state of entire moral pollu-

tion. If any Christian affirms that he had any holy affections, or performed any holy actions, in his natural state, it must be because he uses words in a very vague sense, or because he has not properly reflected on the nature of that divine law which is the standard of holiness.

CHAPTER IV.

Native depravity. Explanation of terms.— Marks which distinguish other things allowed to be natural or native.— These marks belong to man's sinfulness.

Having considered the depravity of man as *universal* and as *total*, I now proceed to inquire whether it is *native*.

The doctrine of *native depravity* has been held by all orthodox churches in Europe and America, both Lutheran and Calvinistic. It is contained in all their creeds. It is distinctly asserted even in the creed of Arminius. It is a prominent article in the only public confession of faith ever adopted by the Congregational churches in New England, and by the Presbyterian and Dutch Reformed churches in America. It is maintained also by the Episcopalians, the Methodists, and the Baptists. The opposite doctrine has been held by no respectable society of men in Christendom, except Pelagians and Socinians. Among those who profess to maintain the substance of evangelical truth at the present day, there are a few individuals who set aside the common doctrine of native depravity; but

they are not so much as one to a thousand of those ministers and intelligent Christians who unhesitatingly believe the doctrine. And yet some of those few individuals, though they still profess to adopt the common orthodox creeds, represent the doctrine of *native depravity* as a doctrine which was bred in an age of ignorance and superstition, and as destined to vanish with other forms of ancient error. Yea, they sometimes speak of it as though it had already past away from the minds of all enlightened Christians. And I am sorry to add, that instances are not wanting in which professedly orthodox men treat the doctrine with ridicule and scorn. Whether all this is just and proper, and indicative of a becoming state of mind, I leave to the judgment of others. We must indeed acknowledge that the great body of Christians, being uninspired, have been, and are still, liable to error; and their opinions have no authority to bind our faith. The word of God is our only sure guide. This divine word we must examine for ourselves. And in present circumstances it is important that we should examine it with special care, guarding against prejudice, opening our hearts to conviction, keeping our minds candid and patient and our feelings unruffled, and looking continually to God for the guidance of his Spirit. And if we would be established in the truth and secure the benefits of Christian faith, we must resolutely avoid the pernicious habit of ruminat-

ing perpetually on objections and difficulties, and must give our undivided attention to the evidence which supports the truth.

As the topic now introduced is the principal one which is to be discussed in this Essay, I shall consider it more at large. And to avoid ambiguity, and to prepare the way for a fair investigation of the subject, I shall briefly explain the terms commonly employed in relation to it.

The word *depravity*, relating as it here does to man's *moral* character, means the same as *sinfulness*, being the opposite of moral purity or *holiness*. In this use of the word there is a general agreement. But what is the meaning of *native* or *natural*? Among the variety of meanings specified by Johnson, Webster, and others, I refer to the following, as relating particularly to the subject before us.

"*Native. Produced by nature. Natural, or such as is according to nature; belonging by birth; original.*" *Natural* has substantially the same meaning: "produced by nature; not acquired." — So Crabbe. "Of a person we say, his worth is *native*, to designate it as some valuable property *born with him*, not foreign to him or ingrafted upon him; but we say of his disposition, that it is *natural*, as opposed to that which is acquired by habit." And Johnson defines *nature* to be "*the native state or properties of any thing, by which it is discrim-*

inated from others." He quotes the definition of Boyle; "Nature sometimes means what belongs to a living creature *at its nativity*, or accrues to it *by its birth*, as when we say a man is *noble by nature*, or a child is *naturally forward*. "This," he says, "may be expressed by saying, *the man was born so.*"

After these brief definitions, which come to nearly the same thing, I proceed to inquire, *what are the marks or evidences which show any thing in man to be natural or native; and how far these marks are found in relation to depravity.*

What then are the evidences that any thing belonging to man is *natural* or *native*? What are the circumstances which mark that which is so? There will be some evident advantages in pursuing this inquiry, in the first place, in relation to those things concerning which our minds cannot be subject to any prepossession, or wrong bias. Having the advantage of an impartial, candid state of mind, we shall be likely to arrive at a just conclusion. And then we can apply the same reasoning, and bring the same impartial state of mind, to the subject before us, and so have the same prospect of coming to an equally just conclusion.

1. One of the marks which we should expect to find belonging to a native attribute or quality of man, is, *its being universal*. There are indeed characteristics of particular individuals or families, which we

consider to be native, although they are not found in men generally. But if we say that any attribute *naturally* belongs to man, as a species, or that it belongs to *human nature*, it would seem to be implied that it is universal; unless some special change occurs in individuals touching that particular attribute.

Thus we consider *memory* to be a natural attribute of the human mind, as it is universally found in man, except in those instances in which its operation is prevented by some disorder.

It is specially in favor of supposing that a particular attribute is natural to man, if *it is not only found in all men of the present generation, but has been found in all the individuals of the human race from generation to generation in times past*. This would show clearly, that the attribute intended does not arise from any particular causes which operate at one time or in one part of the world more than another, but from a cause which affects all alike; that it belongs to the very nature of man, or certainly results from it, so that wherever human nature exists, there this attribute will exist.

2. Another circumstance showing a particular attribute to be natural to man, is, *its developing itself in early life*. If any thing begins to manifest itself very early; if without exception it comes out in visible operations and fruits as soon as the bodily and mental powers of individuals render them capable of such

operations ; in other words, if it is developed as early as there is opportunity or capacity for its development ; we consider this as a proof that it is natural to man, or a *native quality*.

3. It is a circumstance which affords additional proof that a particular attribute or quality is natural to man, *if it is evident that it is not owing to any change which takes place in him subsequently to his birth*. Should we be able to trace the particular thing which is early exhibited by any individual, to a change which occurred in him still earlier ; we should consider it, not as a native property, but as attributable to that change, or perhaps more properly, to the particular cause from which the change resulted. But if there is no reason to suppose any such change previous to the development of the particular thing under consideration, we should of course regard that thing as natural.

4. Another circumstance which generally marks an attribute which is natural to man, is, *its operating freely and spontaneously*. This may indeed be found to belong to some things which are not natural. But we expect that a principle or disposition which is natural to man, will operate with freedom ; that when a fair occasion comes, it will show itself spontaneously.

5. That which is natural to man is generally *hard to be resisted and overcome*. This is the case with all those affections which are usually called natural.

They are deeply rooted in man's nature ; and no ordinary means are sufficient to eradicate or subdue them. Accordingly when we find it so with any particular thing, we regard it as a mark of its being natural ; although the same is true of some of those habits or propensities which are acquired.

6. There is one more mark of what is natural to man, which, though not essentially different from the first, may be distinctly considered, namely, *that we can predict with certainty that it will in due time act itself out*. This we are able to do in regard to every native principle or quality in man ; but we cannot do it in regard to any thing which is not natural, or which does not certainly result from the original nature of man. If it depends on external circumstances which may belong to some individuals and not to others, how can we be sure that it will ever show itself or ever have existence in any particular person ?

I might mention other marks of what is natural to man, but these seem to be the most obvious and important. If now we examine any thing, whether bodily or mental, which we consider as natural to man, we shall find it has these or most of these marks, and that we have no other way of proving it to be natural but by referring to these very marks. How do we prove the bodily appetites or senses to be natural ? How do we prove the faculties and propensities of the mind, such as reason, will, mem-

ory, conscience, parental love, sympathy and gratitude, to be natural?

Have we any better evidence, or any other evidence than this, that they are found universally to exist in mankind, except in cases where some extraordinary cause has operated to produce an exception ; that they show themselves very early, or at farthest as soon as circumstances exist which are suited to call them forth ; that they are evidently not owing to any essential change which takes place in man's nature after his birth, that they are found to operate spontaneously ; that they are hard to be resisted and subdued ; and that it is manifestly certain that every human being who comes into the world will in due time exhibit them, unless some extraordinary cause turns him from his natural course. That the bodily senses and appetites are natural to man, no one doubts. Nor is there any more doubt as to the leading attributes of the mind. Who does not admit that reason and moral sense and memory and sympathy and love of offspring, are as natural to man as the bodily appetites or senses ? that they as really appertain to the nature which man possesses ? The corporeal and the mental attributes of man, are indeed brought into visible action at different periods, some at the very commencement of life and others afterwards. But this makes no difference in our judgment on the present subject. We alway

consider the sense of seeing, hearing, and tasting, as native properties of man ; and we should consider them in the same light, if they were first exercised at a much later period than is common. So it is with reason, memory, conscience, and parental affection. They do not develop themselves at the commencement of life. The new born child does not immediately show reason, or memory, or conscience. And that love to offspring which is by way of eminence called *natural affection*, does not appear to rise in the mind and to act itself out, before the parental *relation* exists. The faculty of speech, which is natural to man in distinction from the brutal species, waits for its developement till the bodily organs and the mental faculties have acquired the necessary strength and activity ; and then it develops itself very gradually, beginning with broken, defective expressions, and proceeding slowly to a perfect language.

These remarks prepare the way for a proper consideration of the subject of depravity. For if this has all the marks belonging to other things which are acknowledged to be natural to man, why should it not be considered in the same light ? The question then is ; *Has it the same marks ?* Are there as many and as strong reasons for calling man's sinfulness natural, as for calling any of his other attributes so ? In my apprehension there are.

In the first place, moral depravity, as we have already seen, is *universal*. It extends through the whole species. All are sinners. We can no more find those who are free from depravity, than we can find those who are without reason, or memory, or social affection, or bodily appetites.

Secondly. Depravity *shows itself very early*. As soon as children acquire such strength of body and mind, as to be capable of unfolding their true character, they show that they are depraved. As soon as they manifest any moral feelings, they manifest those which are sinful. Among the earliest things which we can observe in others, or recollect in ourselves, we find the indications and incipient exercises of wrong affection. Has not this then the same mark of belonging naturally and originally to man, as any thing else which begins to act itself out in early life?

Thirdly. The sinfulness which thus early shows itself in man, *cannot be traced to any antecedent change in his moral character*. Were it owing to such a change, it could not with propriety be called natural, however early it might appear. Suppose any disorder or defect of mind, for example, idiocy, shows itself very early in a child; yet if it can be traced to any injury or bodily distemper which occurred after birth, we never speak of it as native. But if there has been no such calamity; if without any injury or any bodily distemper occurring subsequently

to his birth, the child shows uniformly, as soon as he shows any thing, that he is wanting in the power of understanding; then we consider his idiocy as native. We say, *he was born an idiot*. Now what is the fact in regard to our moral depravity? Does it appear to result from any *change* which occurs in our moral nature? If there is such a change, it must evidently take place very early in life; because the sinfulness which is here supposed to result from it, shows itself as soon as children are capable of manifesting by intelligible signs what is in their hearts. The change supposed must also be universal. At the very dawn of existence, even before any *distinct* and *visible* exercise of reason, it must take place in the nature of every human being. Is there any proof that this is the case? Is the supposition one which any reasonable man will admit? And would not such a supposition, if admitted, be attended with all the difficulties which attend the common doctrine, and with others in addition?

Is there any conclusion left for us but this, that as moral depravity shows itself at so early a period in human life, and as there is no reason to think that it results from any change in man subsequent to his birth, it must belong to his original disposition, and so deserves to be called *native*.

Fourthly. The moral depravity of man *operates spontaneously*. Like the other natural principles, it

freely acts itself out as soon as the faculties of body and mind are sufficient, and objects of moral feeling are presented. The sinfulness of man is not a thing which it needs hard labor to produce, or which it requires great urgency of motives to call forth. Just as soon as an occasion offers, it rises to view of its own accord. Instead of waiting for pressing solicitation, it seems to have an inward force which can hardly brook restraint, and is impatient to break forth into action almost without occasion. How soon does moral evil in some form or other show itself! How readily does the feeling of pride or selfishness or ill-will come out to view in the looks and actions of little children! It waits not to be elicited by overpowering inducements, or to be produced by long, laborious effort. It is not like the useful vegetable, which will not spring up and grow unless it is planted and cultivated; but like the useless weeds, which are natural to the soil, and spring up and grow spontaneously, yea in spite of all our efforts to destroy them. Sinful affection takes possession of the minds of children before they are aware. It becomes active and predominant in them before they deliberately inquire whether it is good or bad, and so they first become distinctly acquainted with its turpitude by being conscious of its operation in their own hearts. And this spontaneous putting forth of the energy of the soul in moral evil is characteristic, not only of early childhood, but of every period of life.

This mark belongs to human depravity as much as to any of those propensities, whether corporeal or mental, which are universally allowed to be natural.

Human depravity has also the *fifth* mark above mentioned as belonging to what is natural ; namely, *its being overcome with great difficulty*. The enlightened and pious parent is aware of the strong and early propensity of his children to evil. He makes use of all possible means to restrain and subdue that propensity. But it breaks through all restraints. And even when he succeeds in preventing his children from exhibiting their depravity in gross outward acts of wickedness, it still maintains its dominion in their hearts, and gives character to all their affections. But in this respect the Christian's own experience furnishes more striking proof than any observation he makes upon others, that sin is no superficial, accidental thing ; that it is deep-rooted in his nature ; that it is, as it has generally been called, *inbred* ; that it makes a part of himself ; that opposing it is opposing his own natural disposition ; and that getting rid of it is cutting off a right hand or plucking out a right eye. He often finds that the most resolute resistance which he can make against the strong bias of his heart to sin, is unsuccessful ; that all the forces which he can array against it have no effect, but to make its superior power more conspicuous. And he well knows that no motive which can be brought to bear upon the

mind of an unrenewed man, will ever prevail to subdue his earthly, selfish affection, and excite him to love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity; and he is convinced that no power short of omnipotence can accomplish this.

Sixthly. That which I have adverted to as the last circumstance attending what is natural to man, is not introduced as what is essentially different from the points before mentioned, but rather as what results from them. In regard to our subject it is this, that *we can predict with certainty that every human being, as soon as he acts out his moral nature, will commit sin.* This is a very remarkable fact. We fix our eyes upon a new born child, now incapable of exhibiting any of the signs of rational and moral existence; but we can certainly predict that if he comes to be capable of intelligent and responsible action, he will be a sinner. We do not speak of it as a conjecture or a probability. We speak of it as a certainty. But can no precautions, no happy combination of circumstances, prevent this dreadful result? Suppose a child to be, from the first, placed in the hands of parents and teachers who are among the wisest and holiest of mankind, so that he hears nothing from their lips but words of truth and wisdom, purity and love. The conduct which he sees in them is marked with excellence throughout. He is watchfully guarded against whatever would corrupt him or lead him astray, and is, with the utmost

care, placed under those influences which tend to enlighten the understanding, to guide and strengthen conscience, and to excite every good affection. May it not be that this child, living in such circumstances, and trained up under such salutary influences, will escape the fatal contagion and be pure from sin? If ten thousand children, yea if all the children on the face of the earth, should be placed in such circumstances, and should be trained up in the wisest, purest, holiest manner; may it not be that some of them would have a character free from moral evil? The answer must be, "no, not one." Now how could we confidently and certainly predict that all human beings, in all circumstances, continuing unchanged by divine grace, will sin against God, were there not some ground of this certainty in the moral nature of man? It is agreed that no outward circumstances, no influences however favorable, which can be brought to bear upon the minds of men, will ever, in a single instance, guard them against the pollution of sin, without the renewing of the Holy Ghost. The evil then cannot be supposed to originate in any unfavorable external circumstances, such as corrupting examples, or insinuating and strong temptations; for if we suppose these entirely removed, all human beings would still be sinners. With such a moral nature as they now have, they would not wait for strong temptations to sin. Nay, they would be sinners

in opposition to the strongest motives to the contrary. Indeed we know that human beings will turn those very motives which most powerfully urge to holiness, into occasions of sin. Now does not the confidence and certainty with which we foretell the commission of sin, and of sin unmixed with moral purity, presuppose a full conviction in us, and a conviction resting upon what we regard as satisfactory evidence, that sin, in all its visible actings, arises from that which is *within the mind itself*, and which belongs to our very nature as moral beings? Have we not as much evidence that this is the case with moral evil, as with any of our natural affections or bodily appetites? It should be kept in mind that the prediction of future sin, as above described, does not imply, that we have a particular insight into the mind of any individual child. It is sufficient that we know the child to belong to our species, or to have human nature. Our prediction rests solely upon this fact. We know it to be *a law of our fallen nature*, or, if any prefer it, I will say, we know *our moral state to be such*, that every one of our species, whether now born, or to be born, *will be a sinner, and a sinner wholly and forever, unless he is created anew by the Holy Spirit*. And we know and predict this on the same general principle on which we predict any fact as the result of the known laws of the moral or material

world. There are doubtless laws in the moral world as settled and uniform, or a connection of causes and effects as certain, as in the physical world. Nor does this view of the subject involve any difficulty in regard to our responsibility or free agency, if we only remember that the causes which operate in the moral world correspond to the nature of the *mind*, while the causes which operate in the physical world correspond to the nature of material substances; and that the influence of causes, though in both cases equally uniform and certain, is in one case as different from what it is in the other, as the nature of mind is different from the nature of matter.

Now if there is no such invariable law as that above mentioned, no such steady, uniform principle operating in the human mind in its present fallen state; how can we certainly conclude that every descendant of Adam will be a sinner, however many external motives and influences may combine to prevent it? Can it be imagined that a rational and moral being will certainly and constantly resist the strongest motives which urge him to holiness from without and from within, under the glorious dispensation of the Gospel, and rush into transgression, *without any cause*? Nay, must there not be a cause within him of astonishing power, to account for it that he should, even in these most favorable circumstances, uniformly be a sinner, and a sinner wholly

and forever, unless he is created anew by the Holy Ghost? Surely that is a most deplorable state into which man's natural birth brings him, and a most fearful internal principle under the influence of which his natural birth leaves him. "That which is born of the flesh, is *flesh*." And, according to the Apostle, the fruit of the flesh is *sin* in all its various forms.

In opposition to the general course of reasoning here exhibited, it is sometimes said, that Adam, without any original corruption of his nature, was exposed to sin, and did actually commit sin; and therefore that the occurrence of sin in moral beings is no certain proof of a preceding corruption of nature.

In reply to this, I would first recommend the remarks of Edwards on this point in his answer to John Taylor, as worthy of special regard.

Secondly; allowing it to be *possible* that all men would sin without any inherent, natural corruption, we still ask, whether it is *probable*. Is it a fact, that men go into the commission of crimes, without any thing faulty in their previous dispositions? Does observation, and does our own consciousness teach this? It is certainly most natural and satisfactory, in all ordinary cases, to refer the conduct of men to their disposition, or moral state. What is more common than to trace lying, stealing and murder to a false, thievish, murderous disposition? We account for it that they commit such crimes by the existence of such

a disposition. And no one ever doubts that the disposition exists, if the crimes are committed. The latter is always regarded as a proof of the former.

Such is the mode of thinking and judging which commonly prevails among men ; and such doubtless it will be, so long as human nature remains as it is. And we infer men's disposition or state of mind from their conduct, with special confidence, when their conduct is uniform and strongly marked. Now if any one denies this inference to be just in relation to the posterity of Adam, and maintains that the fact of their uniformly sinning can be accounted for without supposing any thing amiss in their disposition ; he sets aside a principle which, in other similar cases, is fully admitted. And why does he set it aside here, more than in other cases commonly occurring ? Why here especially, where the actions denoting the disposition are so uniform, uninterrupted, and unmixed ? It would seem to be at least as agreeable to the common rules of judging, to say that the deliberate and habitual practice of theft and fraud does not prove a thievish and fraudulent disposition, as to say that the fact of men's universally sinning does not prove them to be the subjects of a sinful disposition. Nor can I see the reason why any one should take this position, except it be out of respect to a favorite hypothesis, or because he finds the common theory exposed to certain metaphysical objections. That objections of such a kind

should not be permitted to influence our belief in matters of fact, or in matters of revelation, has, I apprehend, been made sufficiently clear.

But if, after all, any one doubts the propriety of inferring from men's sinful conduct an original sinful disposition or corruption of nature, and asks whether it is not possible to account for their sinful conduct without supposing any such antecedent corruption ; I will endeavour to satisfy him in another way, that is, by proving the existence of such an original corruption of human nature, from the holy Scriptures. This original corruption being thus satisfactorily proved, no one can deny that it directly leads to actual sin, just as any particular disposition, say avarice or revenge, now existing in a man, leads to a corresponding conduct ; and no one can deny that actual sin directly proceeds from such a corrupt disposition, and is a clear developement of it.

That Adam commenced his existence in a state of moral purity, or with a disposition to love and obey God, is generally allowed. That his posterity commence their existence in a moral state materially different from what his originally was, and from what theirs would have been, had not he apostatized, is made as certain as language could make it, by the fifth chapter of Romans, and by other passages of holy writ.

Such being the principle we are taught by the word of God, and such being the natural conclusion from the invariable conduct of Adam's posterity ; and as we can satisfactorily account for their sinful conduct by the admission of a corrupt disposition in them ; if any one rejects this commonly received principle, he ought to be sure that he has a good reason for so doing, and that there is another view of the subject, more conformable to the Scriptures, and to the facts of our own experience.—It does not answer the purpose to argue from the case of Adam ; as it is easy to reply to such an argument, that there may have been something peculiar in his case, which would render it improper to reason concerning it as we do concerning the case of mankind generally in their present fallen state. There is this difference at least, that while Adam's sinning implied a change in the state of his mind from what it originally was, the sinning of his posterity does not imply a change from their original, native character. *They* are born in *sin* ; *he* was created *holy*. *Their* first moral state is sinful ; *his* was sinless. And if his sinning implied a *change* of character, it of course could not result from his *original* character. But in his posterity, sinning does not imply a change of character, but is the result of the state in which they are born.—The question here is not a question as to what is possible, but a question as to what is fact.

CHAPTER V.

The doctrine of native depravity continued. Scripture evidence. Consequences of denying the doctrine.

In discussing the subject of native depravity, I have proceeded thus far, without any direct appeal to the word of God. I have inquired, first, what particular marks distinguish those things which are generally allowed to be natural to man. I have specified these marks, and have shown that they appertain to our depravity. By this course of reasoning I think it has been made to appear, that we have as many and as powerful reasons to consider depravity a native attribute or quality of man, as most of those things which are generally acknowledged to be native. These reasons have satisfied men of enlightened, sober minds, even in the heathen world. And why should they not satisfy *us*? What should hinder us from acknowledging our sinfulness to be natural, when we have such a variety of proofs that it is so, and proofs which in every other case are perfectly convincing? Why

should the same evidence be received as satisfactory in one case, and rejected in the other ?

The way seems now prepared for an impartial consideration of the Scripture evidence. As we have already seen that so many reasons exist for believing the doctrine of native depravity, it would clearly be wrong for any one to come to the word of God with a prepossession against the doctrine. If any prepossession is proper, it is a prepossession in favor of it.

But I ask only that those who inquire what the Bible teaches on this subject, would free their minds from prejudice ; that they would hold themselves ready to receive just what the sacred writers teach ; that they would interpret the Scriptures here as they do in other cases, without the influence of any preconceived opinion, or the influence of any difficulties which may be supposed to attend the common doctrine.

Scripture argument briefly exhibited.

The first passage which I shall produce is Rom. 5 : 12—19. It is far from my design to consider the various difficulties attending the explanation of this passage, or to enter into the controversies which have grown out of it. There are however some truths which are here taught with great clearness, and with-

out the admission of which the reasoning of the Apostle must be nugatory, and the effort he makes to magnify the grace of God in redemption, totally fruitless.

It is evident that the Apostle mentions the connection which the sin of Adam had with the state of his posterity, *not as something new, but as a matter well understood*. He brings it forward, not as a doctrine which is now for the first time to be taught, but for the purpose of making out a forcible illustration of his subject ; i. e. the abounding grace of God in the salvation of his people. The manner in which the Apostle accomplishes this his main design, clearly implies a fixed and very close connection between Adam, and the whole race of mankind ; a connection of such a kind, that his transgression involved them in great and dreadful evils. These evils are described in a variety of expressions. “By the offence of one the many died.” “The sentence was by one offence unto condemnation.” “By the offence of one, death reigned.” “By one offence the sentence came upon all men unto condemnation.” “By the disobedience of one man the many were constituted sinners.” Now if by these expressions, so strong and so often repeated, the Apostle did not mean to teach that the sin of Adam brought ruin upon his posterity ; then how does he make this case an illustration of the everlast-

ing blessings which Christ procured for his people? And if death and condemnation come upon the posterity of Adam by his offence, or in consequence of his transgression, it would seem plainly to follow, even if it were not so expressly asserted in this place, that *all the individuals of the human race are involved in those evils*, seeing they all stand in the same relation to him. So that if we look upon any who are *the posterity of Adam*, we see those upon whom death and condemnation come by his offence. There can be no exception. As to any of the children of Adam, and as to any who can receive the benefits of Christ's death, it is evident from this passage, that they are among those who were brought into a state of condemnation and death by the "one offence." The question which at present calls for attention, is, whether the evils which are the consequence of Adam's offence, come upon any *who are themselves sinless, and who are so regarded by the divine government*.

This question must, I think, be answered in the negative, for the following reasons.

First. It is represented in this very passage, that one of the consequences of Adam's sin is, that all men are "constituted *sinner*s." And in another part it is taught that death came upon all men for the very reason, that "all had sinned." Though "death," or "the sentence of condemnation," came upon all by

Adam's offence, as a distant and general cause ; it might still come upon them *by their own personal sinfulness* as *the proximate cause*. Just as it is said, that the children of Israel suffered the judgments of heaven from generation to generation "for the sin of Jeroboam,"—this having been *the more distant* cause which brought those judgments upon them, while the *immediate* cause of their sufferings was *their own wickedness*. The sin of Jeroboam, so often mentioned in Scripture, affected them *primarily*, as I think, by leading them into sin, and *consequently*, by bringing just punishments upon them from the hand of God. This example may show that when the Apostle says, "death," or "the sentence of condemnation," came upon all men by the "offence of Adam," there is no reason to understand him as intending to exclude their own personal sinfulness from having an influence in the affair. Why is it not perfectly reasonable to suppose that the natural evil which comes upon the human race, may have a connection *both with Adam's sin, and their own* ? It may have been the effect of his sin as a general and distant cause, and the effect of their own sin as the proximate cause. That is, it may have been the real effect of both, though in different senses. What is more common than the connection of an effect with two or more causes in different respects and in different degrees ? The conclusion then which seems

clearly to result from this passage, is, that Adam's sin does not bring death and condemnation upon his posterity, *they themselves being sinless* ; that none of them suffer penal evil in consequence of his sin, *without being sinful themselves*, it being one of the effects, and as I think, the primary effect of his offence, *that they are all constituted sinners*.

Secondly. Many other passages of Scripture teach that the evils which come upon mankind, respect them not as innocent and pure, but *as sinners*. When the prophet Ezekiel declares, that the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, it would seem to be his object to guard against the idea, that men suffer for the sin of others while they themselves are free from sin. The meaning of the complaint made by the children of Israel was, that they suffered what they themselves did not deserve, on account of their fathers' wickedness. The prophet corrects the mistake. He tells them that punishment follows personal ill-desert. But surely he does not mean to contradict the declaration which God himself had made, that he would visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation ; — a principle so important, that God appended it to the second command in the decalogue, and wrote it on a table of stone. Notwithstanding this general principle of the divine government, it is often represented in Scripture that the soul which sinneth shall die, —

that the wages of sin is death ; sin and death belonging to the same subject.

Thirdly. It seems difficult to reconcile it with the justice and equity of God, as moral Governour, that he should visit the evils implied in "death" and "condemnation," upon any who are, in every sense, free from moral evil. The law connects the death and condemnation of men with their own disobedience ; and it equally connects their happiness with their obedience. Now it would be quite unreasonable to suppose that there is any thing in the divine constitution or the divine conduct which tends in the least to subvert or contravene this grand principle of moral government. Whatever may be said as to the sufferings of the brute species, it is certainly the case that when pain is inflicted by the Governour of the world upon those whom he has made intelligent, moral beings, and placed by the very constitution of their nature under his moral government, our impression naturally is, that the infliction indicates divine displeasure, and so implies that he sees sinfulness and ill-desert in those who suffer. Unless therefore there is something which plainly opposes this impression, we must conclude that among intelligent, moral beings, sin is coextensive with suffering.

The application of this principle to the case of infant children, will be particularly considered in the sequel.

In attending to the representation of the Apostle, Rom. v, in regard to the death and condemnation which come upon mankind in consequence of the offence of Adam, the question arises, whether these evils come upon them as beings morally pure; in other words, whether the Apostle means to teach that any of those whom he represents as standing in such a connection with Adam, and as brought under death and condemnation by his offence, do in fact suffer those tremendous evils without being personally sinful. I answer in the negative, for the reasons above given. First: we are taught in this very passage that those who suffer these evils, are *constituted sinners*, and that death comes upon all because that *all have sinned*. There is no exception made. Secondly: other parts of Scripture teach the same. And, thirdly: it is a well known principle, and one which we almost instinctively admit, that those who are placed under a just moral government, never suffer without sin. The result of the whole is, that the fact stated Rom. v, namely, that all the human race are subjected to death in consequence of Adam's offence, manifestly implies *that they are all personally depraved*. And they become personally depraved *as the children of apostate Adam*; are *constituted sinners* by his offence. His sin is the occasion of their being *sinners*; and it has this influence upon them by the sovereign constitution of

God, which brings them into such a relation to their common father. They are depraved in consequence of their coming into existence *as his posterity*. And what is this but saying that their depravity is natural? that it belongs to them in their native state, or the state in which they are born?

The next passage which I shall cite, and which will directly confirm the views above expressed, is John 3: 6: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." What is meant by flesh at the close of the verse, *σαρξ ἐστι*? This we may learn from the connection and drift of the discourse. Our Saviour evidently meant that in man which disqualifies him for the kingdom of God, and which renders it necessary that he should be created anew by the Divine Spirit. And what is this but moral depravity? What but a sinful heart can debar any man from the blessedness of heaven? What but this can make it necessary to our happiness that we should experience so great a change as to be born again? It is then perfectly obvious that the word *flesh* is here used to denote a *sinful nature*, a state in which the soul is subject to carnal and earthly desires, instead of being subject to the law of God.

This interpretation of the word is supported by the fact that the same word is often used in a similar sense in other passages of Scripture. In Rom. vii and viii, to be "in the flesh," to have a "fleshly" or

“carnal mind,” denotes a state opposite to being a Christian, — a state of enmity against God, — a state of spiritual death. And in Gal. v, the Apostle speaks of the flesh as that in man which lusteth against the spirit, i. e. has desires in opposition to holiness and to that Divine Spirit which is the author of holiness. And when he mentions the works of the flesh, he mentions the various forms of sin. As we thus find that the word *flesh* is often used in this moral sense, and is manifestly intended to denote the sinful disposition and character of man, we are confirmed in the interpretation which has been given of it as used in John 3 : 6.

Let us now consider the other part of the passage : “That which is born of the flesh, &c.” “Born of the flesh” is the common characteristic of human beings. It is that natural birth by which they are brought into personal existence. Now Christ teaches us that the depraved moral nature of man comes by his natural birth ; “That which is born of the flesh is flesh.” It is sometimes thought that the word *flesh* in this verse is used in senses altogether different. But may not the senses in the two cases be more nearly alike than has been commonly supposed ? It is very evident that the word in the last case denotes a morally depraved nature, a sinful character in all who are born. And may it not in the first case denote the same nature in those of whom they are

born? The children are like their parents. This is a general law of our nature. And fact proves, as well as the Bible, that this is as true in a moral sense as in any other. Through all generations parents and children have had the same unholy affections, the same sinful character. The only exception to this is the case of the Saviour, whose conception was not according to the established laws of human descent. The fact has been perfectly well known from the beginning to the present day. So that it was a very pertinent question in Job's time, and is so at all times; "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" and "how can he be clean that is born of a woman?"

The two points above mentioned are, I think, specially important in the interpretation of the text, "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh." First, flesh, as used at the close of the sentence, signifies man's sinful disposition, his moral depravity. It certainly refers to man as a moral, accountable being, and indicates such a sinfulness in his character that he must be renewed by the Spirit, or he cannot see the kingdom of heaven. And, secondly, this depravity comes by natural descent. Man has it in that state into which he is born, or as he is born, or in consequence of his birth; but it is in consequence of his being born of parents who have *the same character of depravity.*

This construction is sustained by the clause immediately following. "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." "Spirit," at the close, must mean spiritual, holy affections,—a pure and heavenly state of mind,—a character conformed to the divine law. And this character is that which he has as born of the Spirit, or in consequence of being born of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the author of the new birth; and as that which is derived from depraved parents is depraved, so that which is derived from the Holy Spirit is holy. As the phraseology in the two parts of the verse is similar, the interpretation of both proceeds on the same principle. That which is born in each case, resembles that of which it is born.

The sense I have given of the passage is maintained by the best commentators. Even Rosenmuller gives nearly the same sense. "By flesh," he says, "is meant the nature of man,—man with all his moral imperfection, subject to the dominion of his bodily appetites. And *he that is born of parents who have this moral imperfection, is like his parents.*" So Knapp: "*That which is born of the flesh is flesh.* From men who are weak, erring, and sinful, *men of the same character are born.*" So Dwight: "The fleshly character is inseparably connected with *the birth of man.*"

As farther proof of the correctness of the above interpretation, and of the truth of the common doctrine

of native depravity, I cite Ephes. 2: 3. The Apostle says of himself and other Jews, "We were by nature children of wrath, even as others." To be children of wrath, is to be exposed to God's displeasure, to be deserving of punishment. So Schleusner and others. Jews and Gentiles then, i. e. all men are deserving of divine punishments, "*pœnis divinis digni*;" which is the same as to say, they are *sinner*s. And the Apostle says they are so "*by nature*." The first meaning of the word, according to Schleusner, Wahl, and others, is, "*birth, origin, nativity*." Gal. 2: 15. We were by nature Jews. *Φυσεὶ Ἰουδαῖοι*. We were *native Jews*,—*born Jews*.—The next meaning given by Schleusner and Wahl is, "*that which belongs to a thing from its origin or birth; native disposition, native qualities or properties of any person*." When therefore the Apostle teaches that men are sinners, and so children of wrath, "*by nature*," the obvious meaning is, that they are so *by birth*, or *in that state into which they are born*; that this is their native character and condition. If a man comes to possess a particular character in consequence of a change which takes place in him when he is a child or afterwards, we never say, he is what he is *by nature*. Accordingly we never say a man is by nature holy; because this would mean that holiness is his native character, or is natural to him; which would be wholly inconsistent with its resulting

from a spiritual and supernatural change, or a new birth. We say of some persons of a particular temperament, that they are *naturally indolent*. But suppose their indolence is the consequence of disease. We then say, indolence is not their natural disposition, but has come upon them in consequence of a particular cause.

Knapp, in his remarks on Eph. 2: 3, explains the term *φύσις*, (nature,) thus; “*φύσις* properly signifies, first, origin, birth, from *φύω*, nascor, to be born. So in Gal. 2: 15, *φύσει Ιουδαίαι*, Jews by birth, native Jews; and so in the classics. Secondly. It is also used both by the Jews and classics to denote the original, inborn, and peculiar properties, attributes, or nature of a thing or person, the *naturalis indoles*, or *affectio*, as Rom. 11: 21, 24.” “The term natural is used in this doctrine in opposition to what is acquired, or first produced or occasioned by external causes. It denotes that for which there is a foundation in man himself.”* “We say for example, that such a man has natural sagacity, that a disease is natural to another, that he is by nature a poet, &c., because the qualities here spoken of, are not the result of diligence, practice, or external

* So Dr. Nathaniel Taylor, in his *Concio ad Clerum*, speaking of the sin of man, says, “The cause is in his *nature*, not in his circumstances.” He says also, “All the world ascribe an effect to the nature of a thing, when no possible change in its appropriate circumstances will change the effect.”

circumstances." He says, "Some prefer the word *innate*, a term which, as well as the other, is Scriptural." He refers to the elder Pliny's use of the word *congenitus* in the sense of innate, and Cicero's use of *nativum*; and then adds; "It is with justice that a quality which had its origin at the same time with man, which is found in him from his earliest youth, and can be wholly eradicated by no effort, is denominated *natural*. In this sense we speak at the present day of innate or hereditary faults, virtues, and excellencies." Knapp's Theology, vol. 2, pp. 65, 67.

A careful comparison of Eph. 2: 3, with the one before considered, (John 3: 6,) would confirm all that has been said. Christ expressly represents our carnal, depraved disposition, as arising from our *birth*. "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh;" just as holiness arises from our renewal, or the second birth. And here the Apostle says, we are children of wrath, (and by implication sinners,) *by nature*. The general idea is manifestly the same.

The words of David, Ps. 51: 3, have generally been referred to as evidence of native depravity. "Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." A similar representation is made in Ps. 58: 3, where the wicked are said to "be estranged from the womb," and in Isa. 58: 8, where men are called "transgressors from the womb." The

sense of the text, Ps. 51: 3, may be determined, first, by the general scope of the passage. David is deeply impressed with his own sinfulness, makes humble confession, and prays for purification and forgiveness. "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgression, and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.—Behold I was shapen in iniquity," &c. Then he recognizes God as requiring purity of heart, and prays that he would impart it. "Purge me with hyssop," &c. The declaration, verse 3, stands thus in the midst of the most humble confessions of moral pollution, and the most fervent supplications for cleansing; and it doubtless has a meaning correspondent with the general current of thought in the place. When the same writer says of the wicked, that they are estranged from the womb and go astray as soon as they are born, and the prophet says, "I knew that thou wouldst deal very treacherously, and wast called a transgressor from the womb," they evidently intend to make a strong impression of criminality. It is the same as though they had said of the wicked, that they have not only sinned in particular instances and under great temptation, but have *always been wicked, sinning from the very beginning of their existence*; in the forcible language of Scripture, *sinning from the womb, or as soon as born*. Now what is more

natural than to consider David in Ps. 51, as reflecting, first, upon the particular transgression he had committed; then turning his eye upon the fountain of pollution within, and upon the various exhibitions of it in his past life, and acknowledging with shame and penitence and self-loathing, that he had been sinful all his days; that he was even born in sin. Just as we sometimes say of a proud, selfish, malicious man, to aggravate the hatefulness of his character, *he has had that vile disposition ever since he was born. It is his very nature; he was born so.* The language in which David charges himself with being so sinful from the beginning of his life, is undoubtedly figurative, and expressive of strong emotions. But because he expresses the thing very forcibly, and in language which goes beyond what is customary where there is no emotion, shall we coldly explain away the obvious sense of the passage, and overlook that consciousness of deep pollution which the words reveal? The best means of understanding the passage is, to possess the same state of mind with David. If any of us were in his circumstances, and had his conviction of sin, his penitence and self-loathing, and his desire for purification, it would become perfectly natural for us to utter our feelings in the same impassioned language.

But the sense of the words before us, which is so apparent from a consideration of the drift of the passage, will be still more satisfactorily seen by comparing

this text with the other passages before mentioned, where the same truth is set forth in a more didactic form, and in language which admits of a more exact and rigid interpretation. David utters the sense he has of that deep depravity of his heart which had been acting itself out all his days, by saying, that he was born in iniquity and conceived in sin, i. e. was sinful from his birth and by his birth.* Paul teaches that we are children of wrath "*by nature*;" and Christ teaches that a carnal mind, an earthly, sinful disposition, is born with us; — "That which is *born* of the *flesh is flesh*." And to remove every reasonable doubt, compare all these texts, and others bearing on the same subject, with the general fact which every attentive observer of human nature has noticed, namely, the putting forth of a wrong spirit of mind in early life.

On the whole I think it will appear to every one who examines the subject with candor, that, even without revelation, we have as much evidence in this case, as we have in other cases where no one has any doubt. Take those things which are usually regarded as natural to man, — native attributes or qualities of his mind. Take, for example, *intelligence, a disposi-*

*Professor Stuart says, "It may be that David means to say here, *I am sinful, and descended from a transgressor. I am a degenerate plant of a strange vine.*"

tion for society, and parental affection. Why are these regarded as native properties of man? Evidently because they uniformly and spontaneously develop themselves when his bodily and mental powers become capable of making such developement, and when the proper occasion for it occurs. What other evidence have we that these are natural to man? And is there any other proof than what I have above suggested, that it is natural to man to have a soul, or that he is born with a soul? Is it said by way of objection, that there is no appearance of depravity in man for some time after his birth? This is admitted to be true. And is not the same true of reason, of the social and sympathetic dispositions, of parental affection, and even of the existence of the soul? Some of these are indeed developed very early, as the existence of mind, and reason, and a social disposition. But other properties which are natural to the mind are developed at a later period; and the parental affection can hardly be said to come into distinct operation before the parental relation exists. And yet who ever hesitated on this account to consider parental affection as natural to man? Is it not just as evident that this affection results from the nature which man receives at his birth, as it would be if it began to operate as soon as he is born? Such is the argument for native depravity, even without calling

in the evidence from revelation. But when this is added, the proof, I think, is in the highest degree convincing.

I have at present only one additional view of the subject to present. Suppose we had the same evidence of the *opposite* fact, as we have of native depravity; suppose that human beings were universally holy, as Jesus was; suppose the feelings developed in early life, and afterwards, were, in every man, uniformly right; suppose that all the temptations to sin with which mankind are beset from the beginning of their life, should fail, as they did in the case of our Saviour, of producing the least moral pollution; and suppose, in addition to all this, we had a declaration of an Apostle, that all men are *by nature* objects of divine complacency and heirs of heaven, and a declaration of Christ, that that which is born of earthly parents is *holy*; and accordingly suppose we found that there had been good reason for the inquiry among thinking men, *how can that which is born of a woman be impure?* and that an eminent saint, while contemplating with complacency his own uniform goodness of heart, should exclaim, that he was *conceived in purity and brought forth in the holy image of God*; and suppose, once more, that if there were any instances of sin, they were instances of a change from a previous state of holiness, brought about through the influence of some malignant being;

suppose all this to be the case; should we hesitate a moment to say that man is *naturally holy*? or that moral purity is his *native character*? Do we hesitate to say this of Jesus, the son of Mary? And if evidence like this would prove the doctrine of man's *native purity*, why does not the same kind and degree of evidence on the other side prove the doctrine of his *native depravity*? And if any are not convinced of the truth of the doctrine by evidence like this, I beg leave to ask, whether any conceivable evidence would convince them? Let them tell what that evidence is. Let them describe the proof which they would think it reasonable to require, and which would satisfy them of the truth of the doctrine. Do any say, the doctrine is such that it is impossible to prove it; no evidence whatever would convince us of its truth? With such persons arguments would be in vain. They take the position of those Unitarians who say that no possible evidence could prove to them the doctrine of the Trinity; a position which we should hardly expect would be taken by men who entertain even a common respect for reason and philosophy.

Consequences of denying native depravity.

It has always been considered proper to argue in support of any doctrine, *from the evident conse-*

quences of denying it. This kind of argument I think not unimportant in relation to the doctrine of native depravity.

Professor Stuart expresses an opinion which few will call in question, when he says, “Whatever may be the degradation into which we are now born — *we are still born moral agents, free agents, with faculties to do good, yea all the faculties that are needed.*” This is a point in which sober men are generally agreed. We are born with an intelligent and moral nature ; in other words, we have rational souls from the beginning. If any one denies this, he must hold that the human soul is created after the birth of the body. And he must hold that this creation of the soul takes place very soon after the birth of the body ; because only a short time elapses before the human offspring begins to show signs of thought. Does any one hold that the signs of thought and feeling which a young child at first exhibits, are nothing different from what appear in the brutal species, and so are no evidence of the existence of a rational and moral nature ? And does he hold accordingly that a human being exists for a considerable time, — it may be six months or a year, — with only that principle of intelligence and feeling which belongs to irrational animals, and afterwards receives from the creative hand of God a rational and immortal soul ? I reply : if a child may exist so long, and

advance so far towards developing a human character, without a human soul; why may he not advance still farther, and even do without a soul? Or if it should be thought that after a time, (six months or a year or more,) the exigencies of human existence demand the addition of a soul, we should suppose that the time when this important alteration takes place, must be attended with some visible signs; that the transition from the state of mere animal existence, to rational and moral existence, must be followed at once by some remarkable effects. To suppose that so momentous a change could take place without being observed, would be unreasonable. On the contrary, we should suppose that past experience must have shown at what period or near what period of life, such an event usually takes place; and that, when the period approaches, an intense interest must be waked up in the minds of parents and friends, — an interest far greater than that which is commonly felt in the birth of the body. For surely the production of an immortal soul is a vastly more important event, than the bringing forth of a mortal body. If the opinion under consideration is true, then we should think that when the time for the occurrence of such a wonderful event draws near, whether by night or by day, all eyes would be awake to observe it. For who can be inattentive when a little child, say a year old, is about to receive from the hand of God a never dying

soul,—to be changed from a mere animal to a rational and moral being, and so to be joined to the society of those who are subject to law and accountable for their actions? But what evidence is there of such a change? To suppose such a thing would be unreasonable and unphilosophical, if not ridiculous. On such a supposition we might wish to inquire, what becomes of those who die in infancy before they have a soul? Will they ever have a soul? If so, we suppose it must be created and joined to the body at or after the resurrection; for it could hardly be thought that God would create souls in the intermediate time between death and the resurrection.—If those who die in infancy die without souls, and are never to have souls; then we can hardly believe that their bodies will be raised from the dead? For what concern can mere animal bodies have in the judgment day, which is intended for moral beings, and appertains wholly to a moral government? And if those who die in early childhood, are not to be raised from the dead, then what John says, “I saw the dead, both small and great, stand before God,” must be understood in quite a limited sense; for those who die in infancy make no inconsiderable part of the human race. Such a notion as this would occasion great difficulty. How would parents feel, how ought they to feel, in respect to children who live and die without souls, and who of course do not belong to

the family of rational and moral beings, and to whom death will be an eternal sleep? What would parents do with their *natural affections*, which in their very nature imply that their offspring have, not only the same animal nature, but the same intelligent, social, and moral nature with themselves? How should they regulate their *prayers* for their children? Or rather, could they with propriety pray for them at all? And if they pray at all, for what should they pray? And what would be the meaning of religious rites in relation to those who have no souls?

But I have said enough, perhaps too much, on such a subject. For who will deny that human beings are born with souls,—born rational and moral agents? But some admit that men are born rational and moral beings, but do not admit that they are born subjects of moral depravity. But if mankind are born intelligent and moral agents, and yet are not subjects of depravity at the commencement of their being, then one of two things must be true; *they are either holy*, or *they have no character at all*, i. e. are in a state of indifference as to holiness and sin. Rational and moral beings cannot be supposed capable of existing in more than three states; *a state of holiness* or moral purity, *a state of sin* or depravity, and *a state of neutrality*, in which they are neither holy nor sinful. But human beings as they commence their existence, are not holy. This is proved by evidence too clear to be resisted;

and it is a point in which all who believe the Bible are agreed. If then they are not morally depraved, they are in a state of neutrality, having nothing either morally good or evil. Our present business is to examine this position and see what difficulties attend it and what consequences would seem to flow from it.

Here then we have a being with a rational soul, — one *born a moral agent*, without any disposition, either right or wrong, and without any bias or tendency either to good or evil; — a moral nature but no moral character; not even the first elements of it; a rational and immortal mind existing in no state either of holiness or sin. — There seems to be some difficulty too of another kind, and still more important. A rational being, a moral agent, is of course a subject of moral government. From his very nature he is under law. But according to the supposition, this being, who is by his very nature under law, has no relation to law; and has nothing which the law can pronounce either good or bad, — nothing which can be either approved or disapproved by the final Judge. Now suppose he dies in early childhood. As he is born a moral agent, a subject of moral government, he will exist hereafter, and will be called to judgment at the last day. But what can the judgment day have to do with him? What sentence, either favorable or unfavorable, can be passed upon him? He is neither righteous nor wicked, — neither pure nor impure; has

no character, and is in no moral state, unless a change has taken place in him between death and judgment. Accordingly he cannot be admitted to heaven, because he is not holy; nor doomed to hell, because he is not sinful.

Again; if man is not the subject of moral depravity from the first, then there is a period, longer or shorter, at the beginning of life, during which regeneration is not necessary, nor even possible. It is not necessary, because there is no impurity to be removed, no sinful disposition to be subdued, no moral deficiency to be supplied. And as to the holiness which God requires, — what is there to hinder it when the proper time for it shall arrive, and a suitable object shall be presented to view? Evidently there can be no need of the renewal of the heart in order to the exercise of holiness; for the heart, remaining in its native state, in which there is nothing wrong, will, we should think, have right affections when it has any. In such a case how is regeneration even possible? The change implied in regeneration is a change from sin to holiness. But according to the supposition, man, at that period of his existence, neither has nor is capable of having any thing either sinful or holy, either morally right or wrong. So that to suppose a change from the one to the other would be absurd. And if no moral change is necessary or conceivable during the first

period of life, then it would be manifestly unsuitable to pray that a child during that period may have the influence of the Spirit to sanctify his heart; and all the fervent, agonizing supplications which pious parents have offered up to God, that their infant children might be born again, and so fitted for the kingdom of heaven, have resulted from mistake, and have been in vain.

If infant children are the subjects of no depravity and no moral deficiency,—if they are in no sense sinners; then how is their state different from what it would have been if Adam had not sinned? And what is the meaning of Rom. 5: 15, and what follows?

Farther; if the children of men, during the first period of their life, have no depravity; if they are in no sense sinners; then how are they capable of receiving the special benefits of Christ's death and mediation? And if they die during that period and go to the state of the blessed, how are they indebted to Christ for salvation? He *died for sinners*. He came to seek and save that which was *lost*. The Apostle says, "if one died for all, then were all dead;" i. e. dead in sin. Thus he makes the design of Christ's death reach to those, and those only, who are *sinners*, or in a state of spiritual death. Accordingly if there are any human beings who are not sinners, for *them Christ did not die*. For, unless the Apostle was

mistaken, if Christ died for them, they were sinners. If he died for all, then were *all dead*. It would be contrary to the uniform representation of God's word to suppose, that the death of Christ, or the redemption which he accomplishes, relates to any who are not sinners. Theorizers may say what they will; this plain truth will come out, namely, that if all those who die during the first stage of their existence, (and a vast multitude they are,) die without any sin, they are saved, if saved at all, in a different way from the rest of mankind. They owe nothing to Christ as Redeemer. He did not die for them. And they can never join in the song of the redeemed; "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,—be glory and dominion forever and ever." They can never sustain the same relation to Christ with the redeemed, and can never have the same emotions of gratitude to him. The two great blessings which flow from Christ's work as Redeemer, are *forgiveness* and *sanctification*. If the doctrine of native depravity is not true, those who die in infancy are incapable of receiving either of these blessings. There can be no forgiveness where there is no guilt, and no sanctification where there is no depravity of heart. If mankind are not naturally depraved, what significancy would there be in the baptism of infant children? Would not this divine institution become totally unmeaning? As this ordinance is commonly

understood, it denotes purification, i. e. spiritual renewal, considered either as already effected, or as necessary. But it could not have any significancy, if infant children were not in any sense depraved. And if any one who denies native depravity administers this rite to children, he will probably show that he does not know what he is doing. He may pray that God would bless the children, and preserve their life, and make their parents faithful. But unless he forgets himself and his piety prevails over his unscriptural speculations, he will not pray, as is usual, that what is signified by the washing of water, may be accomplished in the souls of the children, that they may now be renewed by the Spirit and made the children of God, and that whether they live to adult years or die in infancy, they may thus be prepared for the kingdom of heaven. And if the same Christian minister is called to pray for infant children who are about to die, he will not, — (unless his piety prevails over his speculations,) — he will not earnestly pray that they may be renewed by the Holy Spirit, and that the blood of Christ may cleanse them from sin. He will not look to redeeming grace to save them. *He cannot do this consistently with his denial of native depravity.* At the present day you may have witnessed more than once, how a minister who has renounced this doctrine is embarrassed and straitened, when he prays for infant children, either publicly or

privately. He does not honestly regard them and feel for them as belonging to the ruined race of man, upon whom death or the sentence of condemnation has come through the offence of one; and he does not pour out his heart to God that he would grant them the blessings of redemption. He does not commit them in faith to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. So, alas! does vain philosophy turn man aside from the simplicity of the Gospel, and check the spirit of prayer, and chill the warmest affections of the soul.

Such as I have now described, appear to me to be consequences of denying the native depravity of man. I might mention still more. Some of those who deny this doctrine, are so bold and independent as to avow these consequences, at least the most important of them. Now in view of these consequences which seem plainly to flow from such a denial, I find great reason to be jealous over myself, and to guard my judgment, my imagination, and my heart, against either neglecting or going beyond the dictates of God's holy word.

CHAPTER VI.

Common objections to native depravity *inadmissible*.

In the preceding chapters the doctrine of man's natural depravity has been stated, and the evidence which supports it briefly exhibited. And in addition to this, some of the consequences of denying the doctrine have been adverted to. Before leaving the subject it may be proper to consider the objections which are commonly urged against the doctrine. But before entering upon a particular consideration of these objections, let us pause a little and inquire what is the nature of the objections usually brought against our doctrine, and how far objections of this kind are entitled to our serious regard.

I cannot but think that we are in danger of being perplexed and led into hurtful mistakes by admitting objections of every kind to be brought against a Scripture doctrine, and allowing them to have influence upon our faith. My meaning may be illustrated by an example. A man is tried for the murder of

his wife, and by evidence which is clear, abundant, and unquestionable, is proved to be guilty. But the counsel for the accused bring forward various objections to the fact of his having committed the deed. They argue, first, that it is extremely improbable, and even incredible, that a man endued with reason and conscience, should commit such a crime; especially that a man, endued with self-love, and a desire for his own safety and happiness, should commit a crime which would certainly expose him to ruin. Secondly, they argue that it is specially unreasonable to suppose that a man should lay violent hands upon the wife of his bosom, the mother of his children, and long the object of the tenderest affections of his heart. Thirdly, they argue that the man had a good education, was brought up in a good family, was esteemed and loved by his friends, and knew the happiness of domestic and social life; and that it cannot be supposed that he should voluntarily break all the ties which bound him to his relatives, and sacrifice all the pleasure he might enjoy in their friendship. Fourthly, they say, how can we believe that a benevolent and powerful God, who directs and controls all events, would give a man up to do a thing so horrible and destructive, or that a just and compassionate God would suffer a harmless and lovely wife to fall a sacrifice to the violence of her husband? These and other like objections are urged to discredit the fact proved, and to make it out that

the man cannot be guilty of the crime laid to his charge. But the learned and upright judge tells the advocates for the accused, that their arguments are *irrelevant and of no weight*; that *objections of such a kind are wholly inadmissible in a Court of Justice*. He asks them whether they have any thing to allege against the character of the witnesses, or any thing to invalidate the testimony they have given. The advocates for the prisoner at the bar reply, that they have nothing in particular to allege in that way, but that they verily think the witnesses are somehow mistaken, and that the man cannot be guilty of such a crime. The judge says to them; "We do not inquire for *your opinions*, but for *facts*. These speculative objections which you urge with so much warmth, have no force, being *mere conjectures, empty notions, matters of imagination or feeling*, which have no agreement with the rules of justice. The Court cannot consent *even to take such objections into consideration*. They are *inadmissible*. How plausible soever they may be, they can avail nothing against testimony and facts. They are excluded by the laws of evidence."

The principle involved in this statement is of great importance, and should be carefully observed in regard to every doctrine of revelation and even of natural religion. When, for example, we have clear and conclusive evidence, from within or from without, of

the being of God, of his providential and moral government, and of the truth of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, we *believe* these doctrines; we believe them confidently, notwithstanding any objections which can be urged against them. But suppose the objections are such that we cannot obviate them; in what way do we dispose of them? We say, these objections are nothing but speculative opinions, the product of an irregular imagination, perhaps of a proud, unsubdued heart. And what can they avail in opposition to legitimate evidence and facts? The infidel comes forward with his objections to the existence and government of God. Are we able to meet them and to show directly that they have no force? No; but we regard them as *inadmissible*. Why? Because they are of such a nature, and used for such a purpose,—*mere opinions, dubious speculations, arrayed against clear evidence and facts*. The Socinian urges a multitude of difficulties which lie against the doctrine of the Trinity. Are we able fully and satisfactorily to solve them? No; we do not pretend to this. How then do we proceed? We hold that the difficulties insisted upon by the Socinian, being made up of mere speculative opinions and conjectures, cannot be admitted to have any weight in opposition to plain Scripture evidence; that, having satisfied ourselves that the Bible is the word of God,

our inquiry is, whether the Bible teaches the doctrine, not whether there are any speculative difficulties attending it. We proceed in the same way as to the atonement, the resurrection, et cætera. And this is the only safe and correct mode of proceeding in regard to the subject now before us. The doctrine that man is by nature entirely sinful is supported by the clearest evidence from the word of God and from well-known facts. Our depravity has as many marks or evidences of being natural as any of the attributes or qualities of our mind. First; it is universal. Secondly; it shows itself very early,—i. e. just as soon as we become capable of acting it out. Thirdly; it cannot be attributed to any change which takes place in man subsequently to his birth. Fourthly; it operates spontaneously, like other natural qualities. Fifthly; it is hard to be resisted and subdued. Sixthly; such obviously is the nature and condition of mankind, that we can certainly predict that all who are born into the world during the present and every future generation, will sin, and sin only through their whole moral existence, unless they are created anew by the Spirit of God. These marks of native depravity are presented before us by the word of God and by observation and experience. I hold that this evidence is *sufficient to establish the doctrine*. If any proper objection is made, *it must be made against this evidence*. But if no one can show any fault in

the evidence, then the doctrine is proved. Does any one affirm that the evidence is defective? Let him show wherein it is defective. What better evidence, nay, what *other* evidence could the doctrine have, supposing it to be true? Review the whole argument again, and examine every part carefully. Take each of the marks of native depravity above mentioned by itself, and see whether it is not as clear an evidence as could be supposed, in case depravity did certainly belong to man. *It is universal.* Could it be more evidently universal if it actually belonged to the moral nature of man from the beginning? *It shows itself early.* If it were in fact a *native* quality, could it show itself earlier than it now does? Does it not take the very first opportunity which the state of the body and mind affords, to act itself out? And does it not, as it were, press for such an opportunity, even before the season for moral action fully arrives? Does not the principle of evil thrust itself out in a partial and broken manner, before a capacity exists for any more perfect forms of transgression? *

* "In combatting the doctrine of innate ideas, Mr Locke, following Aristotle, has compared the human mind to a sheet of white paper, on which characters of different descriptions may subsequently be written. By those philosophers who deny the innate depravity of human nature, the comparison has frequently been applied to the mind in regard to its moral state, its dispositions and tendencies. It will be a juster comparison, if, in this respect,

Again; *moral evil in man is not owing to any change which takes place in his disposition or character subsequently to his birth.* If this is true, is it not a clear proof that depravity is a natural, original property of man? Most evidently moral depravity belongs to him *afterwards*, when he becomes capable of showing what he is. Now if he afterwards has a depraved disposition, and if no change takes place in his disposition subsequently to his birth, then this depravity of nature belongs to him from the first. Is not this evident? Our first parents were depraved. But the Scriptures show that their depravity implied a change in their moral state. They were first obedient and holy. After a time they disobeyed. That act of disobedience was their fall. Before, they stood. They were upright. The act of sin mentioned was their *first* sin. Accordingly we never say that their depravity was natural. If they

we liken the mind to a sheet of paper on which have been written characters in sympathetic ink, which are not discernible by the eye, till, by approximation to the fire, or by some appropriate chemical application, they are brought out into legible distinctness. So is it with the principles of evil in infancy. We may not, for a time, be sensible of their presence; and may be delighted with the smiling harmlessness of the little babe. But the principles are there; and require only the influence of circumstances to bring them into practical and visible manifestation, a manifestation, which, to the eye of even a superficial observer, commences at a very early period.”
Wardlaw's Christian Ethics, p. 98. *London Ed.*

had possessed the same disposition from the first, as they showed when they violated the divine command ; if that had been only the developement of a heart disinclined to obey God, which they had always possessed, we should say their sinfulness was natural, that it originally belonged to them, that they commenced their existence in a state of moral depravity. But there is clear evidence that this was not the case. Now how is it with their posterity ? Is there any evidence that their first state is a state of moral purity ? that they are originally inclined to good ? What evidence should we expect if this was actually the case ? We should expect the evidence of facts. We should expect to see a natural inclination to good unfolded in *acts* of goodness, as soon as men are capable of such acts. We should expect to see an early developement of those right feelings which are the first principles of holiness, — *just such a developement as was made by the child Jesus*. He began his existence as a man in a state of *perfect moral purity*. His nature was holy from the first, and he acted out that pure and holy nature very early, in the way of loving and obeying God. The good tree bore good fruit. This was the visible evidence he gave of his native purity, — his original disposition to goodness. It was just such evidence as would naturally be expected. And it is what we should now expect of human beings generally, if they

were born in a state of moral purity, — unless they were corrupted *after* they were born, and *before* they were capable of visible moral actions. But do the children of men show any such signs of a nature originally pure and holy? I demand then of any who may assert the native purity of man, that they produce some plain proof of such purity. And if there is no proof of this, then clearly there is no proof of any moral change in man after his birth, in order to his being depraved. If it is said, as it is said by Dr. John Taylor and Dr. Ware and others, that we are originally without any moral bias one way or the other, — neither inclined or disinclined to holiness or to sin, — that we are perfectly neutral; here again I call for evidence. What proof might we naturally and justly expect were this the fact? If the minds of men were at first as much inclined one way as the other, certainly we should expect they would show this. And if in some circumstances, that is, in circumstances strongly tempting and urging them to sin, they were to bend *that* way; in other circumstances as strongly urging them to holiness, we should expect they would bend the other way. But our expectation would be sadly disappointed. For the children of men, though supposed to be equally inclined both ways, all *actually incline one way*, and that *the wrong way*; — all of them, as soon as they are capable, yielding themselves servants to sin; — Jesus only

excepted, not one of the whole race, unless born again, ever inclining to the way of holiness. I say then, there is no such evidence as we should naturally look for, to prove that men commence their existence in an indifferent, neutral state, inclined neither one way nor the other. Of course there is no evidence against the common position, that the depravity which shows itself in early life is natural to man ; as there is no reason to suppose that it is the result of a change either from an original state of holiness or from a neutral state. The evidence in favor of our position is then, in this respect, subject to no abatement ; nor is it conceivable how it could be greater than it is.

Another evidence in favor of considering our depravity native, is, that *it operates spontaneously*. It operates thus in early life, and ever afterwards. Is not this such evidence as we should naturally look for to prove human depravity to be natural ? Is it not the same proof that we have that any thing else is natural ? Does not this principle of evil which we have in our hearts, operate as freely and spontaneously as any of our bodily appetites ? Does it not manifest as much intrinsic force, as much impulse to action, as what we call natural affection ? And does it not manifest this as early as the state of the body and mind allows ? Now admitting our depravity to

be natural, could we in this respect look for any greater evidence of its being so than we have? Is it conceivable that a heart really depraved from the first, could act out its depravity more spontaneously, more promptly, or under less force of temptation, in early life, and afterwards, — than the heart of man actually does?

Farther; depravity has the same mark of being natural, with other things commonly considered as natural, in this respect also, that *it is hard to be resisted*. Is not this one of the marks which we should expect to find, supposing our depravity to be natural? And so far as this is concerned, is there any defect in the evidence? Is there any instance among human beings, even among those who attend to religion in very early life, in which the principle of evil in the heart is *easily subdued*? Is there any instance in which it is overcome and eradicated without immense labor and difficulty? Yea, is it ever overcome without the almighty help of God's Spirit? On supposition that depravity does really belong to our moral nature from the beginning, can we conceive that it would require more severe or lasting effort, or more divine help, to overcome it, than is found to be necessary now in the experience of Christians? In this respect then, could any one demand greater evidence that depravity is natural, than we actually have?

There is still another point; namely; such manifestly is the nature of man,—such the state in which human beings are born, that *we can certainly predict that they will all sin, and only sin, unless they are born again.* Is there any defect in *this* evidence of native corruption? Does not the circumstance that we can certainly foretell what will be the moral developement of the mind in every one of our race, imply that the original state of the mind is disordered? As to this matter, we do not wait for developement. We do not wait for a single action or motion of a new born child. As soon as we see a human being, though at the very beginning of life, we know that such a being will sin. Does not this imply that we know what sort of a being he is? But do we know this? And *how* do we know it? Why, how do we know that a young grape-vine will bear grapes, and that a young fig-tree will bear figs? And how do we know that a young thorn-bush will bear thorn-berries, and not oranges? And how do we know that a young lion will be fierce and carnivorous? And how do we know that a new born child will think and remember and feel? We know it from uniform experience. But is not experience just as uniform in regard to sin? Accordingly, we know that every human being will sin, as certainly as we know what will take place in any of the other in-

stances above mentioned. Have we not then, in this respect, the highest possible evidence that man's moral nature is from the first depraved? Does not this perfect uniformity of effects indicate a settled constitution of things,—a uniform cause? Is not this a maxim with all sober men, both as to the physical and moral world? Does any one stare at the conclusion and say, *it may be, after all, that something different will result from the nature or state of mind which man originally has. Children are born intelligent, free, moral agents. Now it may be that some of them will avoid sin and be completely holy, as Jesus was. It may be that some change of circumstances will lead to this. It may be that some of these millions of free agents will give a right direction to their rational and moral powers, and by a sinless life, show that they had no sinfulness of nature. It may be that some of these trees will bear good fruit, and will thus manifest that they are good trees.* To any one who thinks this may be the case, I would just say, if you have doubts on this subject, *wait and see.* Let future experience solve your doubts. If you find any of the descendants of Adam, in any circumstances, who are not sinners,—if you find any of the multitude who are now in infancy, or any who shall be born hereafter,—if you find any one of them free from sin, any one who, without being born again, has any

degree of holiness ; then I will acknowledge that the evidence here presented is defective. The effects, if not perfectly uniform, could not be considered as proceeding from the uniform cause above mentioned, i. e. the original state of the human mind, or the moral nature of man. But as all past experience has been uniform, we must consider the argument good, until future experience shall furnish some exception. And if one single exception shall ever be made ; if there is ever found one son or daughter of Adam who, without being changed by the Divine Spirit, shall love and obey God, then and only then will it be evident that there is a flaw in the argument here used. And if future experience should prove a flaw in the argument, it would prove the Bible false.

As to the evidence from Scripture, I put the same question : Is there any defect in it ? Take the passages separately and together. Do they not teach as clearly as any language could teach, that the character which we have by nature, or in consequence of our natural birth, is such that we cannot be admitted into heaven, without being changed by the power of God ? No words could more certainly show that we have, while unrenewed, a sinful character ; or that this character comes in consequence of our natural birth. No words could more certainly show that we are depraved by nature. The texts need

not be repeated. I contend that the Scriptures teach the common doctrine very clearly, and that it is not easy to conceive how they could teach it more clearly.

I make the appeal then to those who love the truth, and who are accustomed to use their reason and to judge according to evidence. Is there any flaw in the argument by which the doctrine is supported? Is there any mistake in the facts which lie at the foundation of the reasoning? Is not the fact in each case such, both in regard to nature and degree, as I have represented? And does not each fact contain evidence which bears directly upon the question at issue? We hold the doctrine of native depravity, and produce evidence to prove it. Is the evidence deficient? If so, show wherein. In what respect does it fail? But if you have nothing to offer against the evidence of the doctrine, showing that it is in some way faulty or inconclusive; then, according to the rules of reasoning, the doctrine is established.

The objections which are most frequently urged against the doctrine of native depravity, and which have the greatest weight in the minds of men, are of such a kind, that they may be *dismissed at once as worthy of no regard*. They are of no weight in respect to the point at issue. Consisting as they do of speculations, abstract, a priori reasonings, conjectures and cavils, they can never avail any thing

against the evidence of facts. Let these objections be multiplied a hundred fold, — if arrayed against sober, unimpeachable evidence, — evidence which is addressed to common sense, and such as is acknowledged in all other cases to be conclusive ; we fling them to the winds. An objection is stated. We say, what of that ? We have clear, conclusive evidence of the fact. Another objection is stated, and another, and another. We scatter them in a moment with the same question, *What of that ?* It is said, we cannot reconcile the common notion of native depravity with the benevolence of God, nor with his justice, nor with our free moral agency and accountability. Well, admit that we cannot reconcile these things. What then ? Does it follow that *God* cannot ? Are we equal to God ? Farther ; because we are not *now* able to reconcile these things, does it follow that we shall *never* be able ? Be it so then, as the objector alleges, that we cannot reconcile the doctrine of our native depravity with the divine benevolence, or justice. What does this inability, or more properly, what does this ignorance of ours weigh against clear evidence of the fact ? Be it so, that we cannot reconcile our doctrine with our moral agency and accountability, or the principles of a righteous moral government. What does our ignorance in this respect weigh against a matter of fact ? If our

ignorance, or the objections and difficulties which arise from our ignorance, are to be regarded as valid arguments,—if they are sufficient to outweigh clear evidence, and to disprove well attested facts; then I can disprove the Scripture account of the creation, the deluge, and the destruction of Sodom; the doctrine of the Trinity, the atonement of Christ, the influence of the Spirit, the resurrection, future punishment, and most of the doctrines of revelation. And in the same way, I can disprove well known facts in regard to the magnetic power, the growth of a tree, the operations of mind, both awake and asleep, and numberless things which occur in our daily experience; yea, I can disprove the existence of God, and all the doctrines of natural religion. For I can ask questions in regard to each of these which no man can answer. I can bring forward objections and difficulties which no man can solve. But what do these unanswerable objections and these insolvable difficulties prove? They prove *our ignorance*, and should make us very humble. But can they be admitted as valid arguments against obvious and well attested facts?

The remarks above made involve a principle which is of great practical importance. We are often employed in attempting to answer the speculative objections which are urged against the doctrine of natural depravity and other important articles

of our faith. And we sometimes proceed in such a manner as implies that we cannot consistently hold the doctrines of our religion, unless all objections and difficulties are removed. And so we labor hard and spend much precious time in endeavouring to remove them. But this is altogether needless. These speculative objections may be dismissed at once as of no weight,—as totally *inadmissible*. What are empty notions, imaginations, surmises, dreams, originating in minds disordered and dark? and what are complaints and cavils, originating in proud, unbelieving hearts, that they should avail any thing in opposition to clear evidence and fact? When we have looked at the evidence furnished by the word and providence of God, and find what is the fact, our great business as inquirers after the truth is at an end, and our faith settled. And if any one comes forward, not to show any want of clearness or force in the evidence we produce, or any flaw in our arguments, but to bring speculative objections and complaints against a *Scripture doctrine*,—a *well established truth*; the Apostle has taught us how to meet him: “Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God?” We prove the doctrine of divine purposes by clear, indisputable arguments, drawn from reason and Scripture. Now suppose the objector passes by all this evidence, which is the very thing he is concerned

with, and goes to finding fault with the *doctrine itself*: I say, *he replies against God*. He is a *caviller*. We prove that all men are naturally depraved, — sinners from the first, and that they are so in consequence of the original apostacy ; that they are constituted sinners by the one offence of Adam. We prove this doctrine by the plainest and most conclusive evidence. The objector passes by this evidence and disputes against *the doctrine itself*, — against that which the word of God and facts clearly teach. He too acts the part of a caviller. *He replies against God*. He finds fault with God's appointment, with the mode of his operation, and says, it is unjust. He says, if this is God's constitution, then we are not culpable for our sinfulness; and to punish us will be unrighteous. Now when it comes to this, I have only one answer, the answer of Paul to the caviller of his day: "Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay?" Who art thou that demandest the reasons of God's unsearchable dispensations? Does it belong to *thee* to give counsel to the only wise God, or to pronounce judgment on his ways? Does it become a sinful man to say to the Almighty, "What doest thou?" Shall the infinite God ask such a one as thou art, what will be

proper for him to do in creating a world and in fixing the condition of his creatures? Has he not wisdom enough without coming to be instructed by *thee*? Has he not justice and benevolence enough without being prompted to do what is just and benevolent by *thee*? And is he not powerful enough without borrowing strength of *thee*? If he needed help he would not ask it of a worm. Who art thou that repliest against GOD?

CHAPTER VII.

Objections to native depravity particularly examined.

In the preceding chapter, it has, I think, been made to appear that the objections commonly brought against the doctrine of depravity, relating as they do, not to the evidence by which the doctrine is supported, but to *the doctrine itself*, which is a matter of revelation as well as experience,—are totally *inadmissible*. The great question to be settled is, whether the doctrine is *true*, not whether it is attended with difficulties ;—whether it is proved by *sufficient evidence*, not whether, being thus proved, it is liable to objections from the ignorance or pride or ingenuity of man. Even if the objections remain unanswered, they cannot be allowed to have any weight against a doctrine which rests on clear, abundant, and unquestionable evidence. Accordingly I might claim the right of stopping here, resting the truth of the doctrine on the direct arguments which have been urged in its favor, and leaving objections to take care of them-

selves. This, I conceive, would in itself be right. And nothing more is necessary when the doctrine is taught for common, practical purposes. There is even an injury to be apprehended from an attempt to obviate metaphysical objections and difficulties, before those who are not capable of pursuing a metaphysical discussion.

But inasmuch as objections have been continually urged by learned and able disputants, and as these objections are of such a nature as to occasion doubt and perplexity to many sincere Christians, and to diminish the salutary influence of divine truth, I have thought it expedient to bring the chief of them under particular consideration. If I succeed in detecting the fallacy of the principles which they involve, or in showing that, however plausible, they have little or no weight; or if I make it appear that they are not conclusive against the truth of the doctrine; I shall do all that the case requires.

The first objection that I shall now more particularly examine, relates to *the moral perfections of God*. It is alleged to be inconsistent with the holiness and benevolence of God, and even with his justice, to bring men into existence destitute of that holiness which is essential to their well-being, and in such a state of depravity as will certainly lead on to a life of sin and an eternity of misery, unless redeeming grace prevent,—and to involve the whole human race

in this dreadful calamity on account of the one offence of their first father.

To this objection I have already attended. But the principle implied in it is so important, that I shall present it again in a varied form.

With our very limited faculties, and especially while those faculties are so disordered by sin, we are not competent to determine what is or is not consistent with the moral attributes of God, except as we are instructed by his word and providence. "Who hath known the mind of the Lord? Who hath been," and who is qualified to be, "his counsellor?" Who is qualified to tell God what will be fit and what will be unfit for him to do? What means have we of determining beforehand in what manner infinite perfection will be developed, what plan infinite wisdom and goodness will adopt, and how that plan can best be carried into execution? In order to judge on such a subject, we must have an understanding capable of taking into view and knowing perfectly the whole extent of a created universe, and all its operations and results through endless duration: whereas we are not able perfectly to know the smallest part of it, even at the present time. Before the incomprehensible greatness of such an object as the universe, — even that inconsiderable part of it to which we belong, — we are constrained to say, "We are of yesterday and *know nothing*." An ability to

judge on this subject would moreover imply a comprehensive and perfect knowledge of the infinite perfections of God, because the whole system of creation and providence must be considered as standing in a most intimate relation to the divine perfections, as entirely corresponding with them, and as suited most clearly to make them known to intelligent creatures. This view of the subject is calculated to cure our pride and arrogance, and to make us feel that we are to occupy the place of learners, not of judges.

What then is the position which we are to take? As rational creatures, with the works and word of our Creator before us, and with the idea of his infinite perfection within us, what have we to do? Not surely to settle the question whether God is infinitely wise and good, but to inquire how this infinitely wise and good being *has made himself known* ; not what he *could consistently do*, but what he *has done* ; not what his plan of operation *should* be, but what it *is*. There is nothing within the province of our intelligence which we know more certainly than this, that *whatever God does is right*. We can determine then in any case what is right, if we can determine *what God does*. As soon as we come to know what the manner of God's acting is, either in creation or providence, that moment we know what agrees with infinite wisdom and benevolence. This is true in

respect to every particular thing which God accomplishes in the whole compass of his agency. Viewed in the light in which God views it, and in relation to the ends which he aims at, *it is right*. And when we know in any case what the divine arrangement is, though we are totally unable to understand in what particular light God regards it, or what particular ends he means to subserve by it, we still believe and know that it is right. But why do we believe this? and how do we know it? We believe and know it to be right *merely because God does it*. Our conclusion results from our confidence in God. Suppose that Abraham, not yet informed of God's intentions respecting Sodom, inquires with himself; "What ought to be done, and what will a righteous God do, with that guilty city?" He cannot answer the question. Suppose the inquiry arises in his mind, whether God will destroy the city and all its inhabitants, both old and young, with a sudden and dreadful destruction; he cannot answer: or perhaps he may say, "Far be it from a God of infinite mercy to do this." But the moment he sees that God *has* done it, or knows that he *will* do it, he says, it is right. And if any one had said to him: "Do you think that your God and the God of your seed will command you to offer up your son Isaac as a sacrifice?" he would probably have answered, "No; a holy and merciful and covenant-keeping God can never do this." But what

does he do when God actually commands it? Does he hesitate and inquire how it can be consistent with the holiness and goodness and faithfulness of God? No; he instantly acquiesces, and goes to accomplish what is commanded. He has confidence in God, and believes and knows that what HE does is right.

This is the principle on which St. Paul proceeds in Rom. ix. He shows what is the actual conduct of God in saving some and not saving others; in making some vessels of mercy, and others vessels of wrath. He teaches an important fact in the divine administration. Some call in question the propriety of this, and object. But *Paul allows no objection to be brought*. He does not allow men to put the question; "Why doth God then find fault?" He shows them that it is an unbecoming thing for them to reply against God, or to call in question the righteousness of what he does. He rebukes them. The principle he adopts is, that we are to have perfect confidence in God; that as soon as we know what he does, we must be satisfied that it is right.

This principle, if carried into our reasoning on the present subject, will help us at once to dispose of the common objections and difficulties, and will prepare us to believe the truth just as it is made known by God's word and providence.

The first point we are to settle is the matter of fact. Do men come into existence destitute of that holiness

which is essential to their well-being, and in such a state of depravity as certainly leads to a life of sin and an eternity of suffering? The evidence of this fact from the word and providence of God, we have considered. Hardly any doctrine has proof so abundant and satisfactory. Do you say then, this fact is not consistent with the perfections of God? This is now the same as to say, that the perfections of God are not consistent with a well attested, unquestionable fact. But who is to determine whether any particular thing is consistent with the perfections of God;—whether it is consistent for him to do what he actually does? God himself has decided that it is consistent, *by doing it*. Do you say he has not done it? I ask, why you say this? Is it because evidence of the fact is wanting? No; you admit other things upon evidence not half so clear. Is not *this* the reason why any say that God has not brought man into existence in the state above described, namely, that they have made up their minds beforehand, that it is not consistent for God to do it? And have they not made up their minds thus, merely because they are not able *to make out* the consistency of it by their own reason? But is this just? Would it be safe to apply this mode of reasoning to other things? Suppose we find it impossible for us by our own reason to prove the justice and propriety of God's "visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, unto

the third and fourth generation ;” may we hence conclude that it is not just, and so contradict the express declaration of God, uttered on Mount Sinai and written on a table of stone, and say, he does not visit the iniquities of fathers upon the children ? We should not be able by our own reasoning to make out the justice of God’s commanding the Israelites to cut off all the inhabitants of Canaan, both men and women ; and that he should be particular in requiring them to destroy *all the children, — thousands and thousands of little, infant children !* Now because we are not able to reason out the justice of this, shall we say it is not just ; and then deny that God ever commanded such a thing ? In this way we should deny no small part of the Bible, and no small part of the facts which occur in the course of divine providence. We are never to adopt this principle, that what *we* think to be just and right, God will do, and what we think not just and right, God will not do.

This is a fair reply, and all that is due to one who denies a well known fact, and takes upon him to say that the natural depravity of man would be inconsistent with the perfections of God.

But I will now go into a more free and thorough examination of this and other principal objections.

The objector alleges that the common doctrine of man’s natural state cannot be reconciled with the

rectitude and goodness of God. The doctrine is, that all men come into being in such a moral state, that as soon as they are capable they will certainly and uniformly sin, or that their moral affections and actions will all be wrong, unless they are regenerated by the Holy Spirit; and that they are thus constituted sinners by the one offence of their first father. Now in what respects does this doctrine appear inconsistent with the perfections of God? What are the particular difficulties which attend it in relation to the divine character and government? It is said that the doctrine seems to imply that God is pleased with sin and misery, inasmuch as he brings men into being in such a state, that they will all certainly sin, and so expose themselves to endless misery.

Reply. This difficulty may be merely apparent, arising from our imperfect knowledge of the case. It may be that if we could have a perfect view of the subject, as God has, we should be satisfied at once that no such difficulty exists. We must be careful then not to make too much of appearances, especially seeing that we have so often found them fallacious. But let us inquire a little as to the fact. Are there sufficient reasons to satisfy us that God is not pleased with sin? Here the Scripture affords the clearest possible instructions. God in his commands forbids all sin and requires all that is opposite; thus expressing his feelings perfectly as to sin and holiness, and

showing that he hates the one and loves the other. His law too contains *sanctions*. He promises tokens of his approbation to those who avoid sin, and threatens tokens of his disapprobation to those who commit it. Besides this, he expressly declares that sin is the abominable thing which his soul hateth; and the whole course of his providence, from the beginning of the world to the present moment, has shown his perfect abhorrence of sin and his love of holiness. The very constitution of our minds shows this. The whole work of redemption shows it. The judgment day and the retributions of eternity will show it. The evidence of God's hatred of sin is exceedingly and indescribably great, so that all sinners have the greatest possible reason to tremble in view of his indignation and wrath against sin. We certainly know then that God is so far from being pleased with sin, that there is nothing in the universe that he hates so much. And as to suffering, he inflicts it as an expression of his displeasure against sin. Were it not for sin there would be no misery.

What now is the use of these remarks in relation to the difficulty before us? It is this. As we have the clearest possible evidence that God hates sin, we are sure the fact of our depravity must be consistent with his hatred of sin. As both are obviously and certainly true, we know they are consistent with

each other; and the difficulty above supposed is imaginary.

Again; it is said that the doctrine of natural depravity is inconsistent with *the benevolence of God*. Benevolence seeks to do good; it aims at the happiness of intelligent beings. How then can it be reconciled with benevolence in God, that he should bring a whole race of intelligent creatures into existence in a state which will be certainly followed with their disobedience and their consequent punishment? For God voluntarily to give them existence in such circumstances, would seem wholly incompatible with benevolence.

Reply. The alleged inconsistency between our natural depravity and God's benevolence may be merely in appearance. When we arrive at that degree of intelligence which will qualify us to judge correctly on this subject, we may see with perfect satisfaction that these two things, which now seem to be inconsistent, are perfectly consistent. It may be that angels and saints in heaven see this now. And it may be that some men of illuminated minds and purified hearts on earth see it too. And all who have divine teaching may hereafter obtain such clear and extensive knowledge, that they will be so far from thinking the fallen, depraved state of man to be inconsistent with the benevolence of God, that they

will look upon it in its bearings and results, as affording the brightest illustration of that benevolence. This is a most delightful thought to those who sincerely desire to know the truth and are pressing after higher and better views of it. The time will come when we shall have those higher and better views. Present difficulties will vanish. We shall behold in noon-day brightness the excellence of God's character and the wisdom and goodness of all his dispensations. And we shall look back with shame upon the ignorance to which we are now subject, and the mistakes into which we are now continually falling. To a mind laboring in the dark in regard to many important subjects, it is a mighty relief to dwell upon such a reflection as this. The certain expectation of clearer light, and the habit of anticipating it, may have an influence upon us in some respects like what we should experience if we actually possessed that light.

But there is another view to be taken of this difficulty. As the benevolence of God is the benevolence of the Creator and Governour of the universe, it must have respect to the welfare of the whole creation, and must have respect to this, not only for the present time, but through all future time. The benevolence of God, considered in this large sense, which is the only just sense in which the benevolence of such a being can be considered, cannot be satisfied with any meas-

ure because it would be beneficial in its influence on a small part of the creation, unless at the same time the welfare of the whole would be promoted, and promoted in the highest degree and in the best manner. And if the highest welfare of the whole intelligent creation through all ages to come requires an arrangement less favorable to some part of the creation, or, for the present, less favorable to the whole, than some other arrangement might be; that arrangement will certainly be chosen by a God of love. Clearly if God is the guardian of the interests of that universe which he has created and which he has destined to exist forever, his benevolence will lead him to adopt those measures which he knows to be most beneficial to those great interests, though not beneficial in the highest conceivable degree to the interests of a particular part. This however does not imply that God ever adopts a measure which is unjust to a part, in order to promote the welfare of the whole. Far otherwise. The supposition is impious. Can such a Being as God do an act of injustice? The supposition is absurd too. God's kingdom is a moral kingdom. It is placed under a moral law. That law requires holiness and justice and truth, and forbids the contrary. And the welfare of the universe is made to depend on the manifested glory of God, and on the support which he gives to his just and holy law. Now to suppose that God will do an act of injustice to

a part of his kingdom for the good of the whole, is in reality to suppose that he will promote the good of the whole by *injuring* the whole. For God to do an act of injustice would be to countenance the *principle* of injustice. This would destroy his character. And the destruction of his character would be the destruction of his kingdom. His glorious character, displayed in a righteous and benevolent law and administration, is the grand and only security to the interests of his kingdom. It establishes the principles of his moral government, and binds his subjects to him and to one another. That glorious character injured, and the universe is undone. I say therefore, it is the greatest absurdity to suppose that God, by an act of injustice even to the meanest of his subjects, should injure that great interest which he aims to promote, and that he should *injure* it for the sake of *promoting* it. The view which I take of the subject is this. The only wise God, acting as the guardian of the universe, adopts those just and righteous measures which he sees will be most beneficial to the whole, though they may bring less good to a part than some other measures. Thus he places a part, perhaps even the greater part of our race, in circumstances less favorable to their happiness, than other circumstances would have been. But he does them no injustice. He violates no obligation, not even the obligation of infinite benevolence. The acts of his goodness towards them are constant

and numberless; and they have reason to thank and love and obey him with all their hearts forever. And yet it is a fact well known and acknowledged, that the circumstances in which God has placed them are less favorable to their present and eternal happiness, than some other circumstances might have been. Now the all-wise God, as the God of the universe, adopts such a measure, (it being in all respects just and righteous,) because he sees that it will ultimately be more conducive to the welfare of the whole, than another measure which would be more advantageous to a part, but less advantageous to the whole. And this is only saying, that God, being infinitely benevolent, prefers a greater amount of happiness in his kingdom to a less. This exercise of God's sovereign wisdom respects a great part of his own acts as God of the universe.

The sum of my remarks, as they respect the present subject, is this. If God saw that such a constitution of things as this, namely, that all mankind, in consequence of the transgression of their common father, should be constituted sinners, and should have their moral existence from the first in a state of depravity; if he saw that such a constitution would be just and suitable as a part of his universal system, and would on the whole be beneficial in its influence upon the great interests of his kingdom; it was not only consistent with benevolence, but was what benevolence required, that he should adopt such a

constitution. If any one asks what proof we have that God actually viewed such a constitution in such a light ; I answer, we have the best proof, namely, that he has actually adopted it.

We see here what is incumbent on those who assert that man's existing in a depraved ruined state is inconsistent with the benevolence of God. To support their allegation, they must prove that the fact of man's depravity, considered as involved in God's universal system, will not be made to promote his glory and the ultimate good of his creation. This is what they assert ; and this is what they ought to prove. And as it is a very serious matter, they ought to prove it by clear and conclusive evidence. We allow the fact of man's sinfulness to be, *in itself*, altogether and in the highest degree undesirable and deplorable. And we look upon the consequences of the fact, namely, the endless misery of such a multitude of rational beings, with grief and horror. But we hold that all this evil has been and will be so overruled by the almighty Governour of the world, that it will be the occasion of making the brightest displays of his glorious attributes, and of promoting, in a degree not to be measured by finite minds, the blessedness of his moral empire. Those who bring the objection above named, must prove that sin will not be overruled in this manner. For if

God does thus overrule it for good, his benevolence cannot be impeached ; and so the objection falls to the ground.

The other principal objection is, that God's bringing us into existence in such a state as the common doctrine implies, is *inconsistent with our being moral, accountable agents, and so inconsistent with the Scripture doctrine of a just and impartial retribution.*

But I ask, how or in what manner is it inconsistent? First; how is it inconsistent with *moral agency*? Is it the fact of *our being sinners*, that is thought to be inconsistent with moral agency? But how strange a supposition is this, when our being sinners is one of the ways in which our moral agency is exhibited. To suppose that we are sinners without being *moral agents*, is the same as to suppose that we are sinners without being sinners. Sinners are *bad moral agents*, — moral agents of a wrong character. They are *agents* certainly; and they are *moral agents*, because they have sin; for sin can be attributed only to a moral agent.

Is it then the fact of our being sinners *from the beginning of our rational, moral existence*, that is thought to be inconsistent with moral agency? But why is it any more inconsistent with moral agency for a man to be a sinner at the very commencement of his existence, than at any subsequent

period? It is substantially the same thing to be a sinner at one time as at another. And he who is the subject of sin, whether it be at one period of his existence or at another, is truly a moral agent. If sin exists, it must begin to exist either at the commencement of our being or at some subsequent time. And the only difference between its commencement at one time and another, must respect its particular form and degree. If sin takes place when the rational and moral powers are in a low and feeble state, it will exist in a low degree, and in a form corresponding with the state of the mind. If it takes place afterwards, when the powers of the mind are increased, its form and degree will be altered, so as to be still correspondent with the state of the mental faculties.

Does any one say, it is inconsistent with the very nature of sin, that it should exist at the beginning of our existence? I ask, why? The answer of Dr. John Taylor and others is, that the first existence of sin must be the *consequence* or *result* of the actual exercise of our moral powers for some time; in other words, that a person must produce sin in himself, or make himself a sinner, by his own previous determinations and voluntary actions.

This view of the subject we are now to examine. The supposition is, that a person, in the first instance, makes himself a sinner, or produces in himself the

very commencement of sin, *by voluntary determinations and acts*; which determinations and acts must of course precede the existence of the sin which they produce. Now it is a clear case that these previous determinations and acts must be either right or wrong, — either holy or sinful, — or else they must be indifferent, that is, neither right nor wrong, and so not moral acts. If the previous acts are what they ought to be, i. e. right; then we have the strange supposition, that the right volitions and actions of a moral agent produce what is wrong; that his holiness produces sin; that the consequence of his willing and acting right is that he becomes a sinner. If this is the fact, then, how is a man culpable for *becoming* a sinner, seeing that all those determinations and actions of his which produce sin, are right? According to this notion, what assurance could we have that any being will not soon corrupt himself and make himself a sinner *by acting right*? Indeed why would it not on this supposition be true, that the sure way for a man to produce sin in his own heart, is to do just what is right? A wonderful motive truly to the exercise of holiness.

Take then the other supposition; viz.; that a person produces in himself the commencement of moral evil, or makes himself a sinner in the first instance, by previous volitions and actions which are wrong. According to this, a person has wrong exercises, and

has them voluntarily, before he has any thing wrong ; exercises which are sinful, before he has any sin. But how long must sinful volitions and acts be continued in a person in order to his beginning to have sin ? How long must he be a sinner in order to become a sinner ? Doubtless the sinful exercises which precede the first existence of sin, occupy time. How long must that time be ? But enough of this. Any man who will accustom himself to reason correctly, will see the gross absurdity of the supposition above made. Sin is not the product or effect of wrong exercises of mind, but lies in them. They themselves are sin.

The only supposition which remains for one who holds the above named opinion is, that a person makes himself a sinner or produces sin in himself, by volitions and acts which are *indifferent*,—neither holy nor sinful.

Now inasmuch as the person supposed is a moral agent, and inasmuch as he wills and acts in this case with reference to moral objects ; how happens it that his volitions and acts are not of a moral nature ? Is it because at the time he is not capable of good or evil, and so is not accountable for his actions ? It would then come to this, that before a person is a moral agent, i. e. while he is incapable of good or evil, and so not accountable for his actions, he does that which corrupts his heart and makes him a sinner.

And here one might naturally ask, whether it would not be a strange constitution of Heaven, that such amazing consequences, — consequences affecting our immortal condition, should depend on our conduct before we are capable of doing either right or wrong? According to this supposition, things are so arranged by our Creator that we destroy ourselves by our actions, before we are moral agents.

But we must look at this matter a little farther. A person now puts forth acts which are in no respect wrong, as he is not capable of any thing wrong, not being a moral agent. But these indifferent actions, — actions wholly blameless, — are soon to result in sin, a thing which belongs to a moral agent. Now by what process or in what manner does he become a moral agent? And how does it happen that he becomes so just at this time? Do those indifferent, blameless actions which produce sin, produce moral agency too? And if so, how does it always happen, that moral agency and sin come into existence precisely at the same time? Or does a person become a moral agent a very little time, a moment or so, before he becomes a sinner? Or does he become a sinner a moment or so before he becomes a moral agent?

But it may be said, there is no need of supposing the person wholly incapable of moral agency, nor yet, on the other hand, of supposing that those voluntary acts which produce sin, are really holy or sinful. They

may occupy a middle place between good and bad ; and the person may somehow be responsible for them, though he is not responsible ; and through his own fault, he may, before he sins, do that which will result in sin ; and so he may somehow be culpable for making himself a sinner, by doing that which he does before he is a sinner. But on this supposition, does the person *aim* at this result, i. e. to make himself a sinner ? Does he know what he is about ? And does he mean by what he does to produce sin ? If he does, would not this be a sin ? Would it not imply that he loves and chooses to be a sinner ? But if he does not understand the matter, and does not mean to produce this result, but something else, then would it not appear strange that he should be plunged into a state of sin by his own conduct *without his own choice*, and when he thought of no such thing ?

But I have not yet done with the opinion, that a person is culpable, not for the present affection or act which is wrong, but for that previous voluntary conduct or free determination of mind which produced that wrong affection or act. Take present love of sin, or enmity against God, which is an affection of the heart. Do you say, the sinner is not culpable for this affection or state of mind, but for those previous acts of mind which occasioned it ? You say then, that if this wrong affection should be the very first

act of his mind, and so should not be the result of any previous determinations or acts, he would not be blameworthy for it. Though it would be a wrong affection, and might in a certain sense, be called sin, he would not be justly answerable for it, because he did not produce it by his own voluntary agency, or by the acts of his free will.

Here it must be noted in the first place, that the word *will* is often used in common discourse, and in the sacred Scriptures, to denote the entire moral faculty of the mind. According to this use of the word, all the affections, as well as those acts of the mind more appropriately called volitions, are acts of the will. If this is the view we are to take of the subject, then my question is, "Why are we not answerable for one act of the will as well as another?—for the present act, as well as the previous act?" And then it would seem, according to the supposition now made, that we are answerable for the present act *merely because it leads to a subsequent act*. If this is the case, then it would follow, that the evil and blame-worthiness of any affection or act of the mind, does not lie in the act itself, but in the circumstance that it tends to produce other acts which are wrong;—the same holding true of each of those other acts, namely, that its blame-worthiness lies not in itself, or in its own nature, but in the circumstance that it leads on to other sinful affections. And then, it is to be noticed

that this influence of the present act of the mind to produce other acts, is generally, to say the least, not a matter of design. Such an effect is not commonly aimed at. In exercising the present affection, our mind has a particular object in view. Towards that object we put forth an act. We love it or hate it. We have a desire for it or an aversion to it. The affection is very simple, being a feeling of the mind towards that object. As a general fact, we have no other object in view ; and certainly we do not commonly consider the effect of this present act upon future acts of the mind ; indeed we do not know what that effect will be before we have learned it by experience. And suppose we have learned what it will be, and suppose we consider it ; still that effect is not the thing we generally aim at ; it is not generally our intention by this present affection to produce other wrong affections. Thus the supposition would imply that we are answerable for an affection or act of the mind on account of a circumstance which does not fall under our voluntary control ; which generally is not a matter of choice or intention on our part, and which is very often contrary to our choice. For how frequently is it the case with the sinner, that he would be glad to avoid the effect of his present act upon the subsequent state of his mind ? He desires not that effect ; he dreads it. In the present act of his mind,

he has quite another object in view. The supposition would therefore make us answerable for a circumstance, (viz. the influence of our present affection or act,) which does not depend on our choice, and which is often contrary to it.

But why is it supposed that we are answerable for the previous act of mind, and not for the present; and that our blame-worthiness lies, not in the present, but in the preceding? Is it because the one is thought to be of a different nature from the other? But why is it thought to be of a different nature? Suppose the present affection of the mind relates to the same object as the past. Suppose that object to be a moral object, and the feeling of the mind towards it to be love and desire, or hatred and aversion. Does the circumstance that one of them follows the other, make any difference in their nature? The present affection will indeed be likely to be stronger than the former, and if so, will be more culpable in degree; but is not its nature the same? They are by supposition both exercises of the will, and so in the sense now intended equally voluntary. Both relate to the same object. The mind is equally active in both, and equally free from all compulsory influence. Why are they not both of the same nature? And if so, why are we not as answerable for one as for the other?

But the word *will* is used in a more restricted sense, by Locke and others. In this sense a volition or an

act of the will is that determination of the mind which produces some bodily act, or some other act of the mind, and in which we actually aim at that effect ; as when we will to move our limbs, or to exercise the mind in a particular way ; and so a volition is distinguished from the affections of love, hatred, compassion, &c. Let us examine the subject with this distinction in view. The opinion we are examining is, that our blame-worthiness does not lie in the present affection, but in the previous volition or choice which led to it ; in other words, that we are not answerable for the present wrong affection, but for those acts of our free-will by which we produced or excited these affections. Here I remark,

1. That *volition*, in the sense here intended, *is not the cause of affection*. It does not by its own influence produce it. This is so obviously true that no man of sound judgment and experience ever expects such a thing, as to excite an affection in his own mind by the direct power of volition. The affection is excited, and from its very nature must be excited, by a suitable object present in the mind's view, not by an act of the will soliciting or requiring it.

2. *Volition*, in this restricted sense, *is the consequence of an affection*. All the volitions or active choices of a holy being respecting God, are the effect of his supreme love to God ; and the direction of his voluntary agency in respect to other beings arises from his love to them. The particular volitions or

active choices of the selfish and worldly arise from their selfish and worldly affections. They choose to do such and such things, because they have such and such dispositions of mind. Now as the affections are the source of particular volitions, we should naturally conclude that the affections themselves are blame-worthy, rather than the volitions which flow from them.

3. Supposing these affections to be in some way produced by the previous volitions, still what is there in those volitions which should make us answerable for them, more than for the affections which are supposed to be thus connected with them? What is there either in the nature or circumstances of those acts of the mind, which should render us praise-worthy or blame-worthy for them, more than for these? It cannot be said that we have less agency in the affections than in what are more appropriately called volitions. Nothing can be conceived in which our minds are more truly active, or active in a higher degree, than in love, desire, hatred, revenge, &c. Nor can it be said that the volitions are more *voluntary* than the affections. The word *voluntary* is most properly applied to that which is *the effect of choice*, or which takes place *in consequence of a volition*. Now in this sense the affections are not strictly voluntary; i. e. they do not take place as immediate effects or consequences of volition; they do not

rise in the mind in direct obedience to an act of the will. When writers call the affections *voluntary*, it is because they do not make the distinction above noticed between the affections and volitions, but regard them all as acts of the will. Accordingly when they call the affections voluntary, they do not mean to imply that they are consequent upon an act of the will, but that they are themselves acts of the will. If regarded in this light, the affections are as voluntary as volitions, both being acts of the will. *Volitions* are not voluntary in the other sense, which in metaphysical discourse I consider the proper sense of the word; i. e. they do not flow from a previous act of the will, but from the influence of those inducements or motives under which the mind is placed. Taking the word therefore in either sense, we find the affections no less voluntary than the volitions. Why then are we not as responsible for them? I say this with reference to those who suppose every thing for which we are accountable to be voluntary.

I have not thought it necessary to expose the opinion we have been considering as Edwards does, in his work on the Will, by showing that, if adopted, it would exclude all virtue and vice from the world. His reasoning on this subject is a very striking example of the *reductio ad absurdum*. No one can resist the force of his argument in any other way than by refusing to consider it.

But I have still another inquiry. Is not the mind as much the *author* of the affections as of the volitions? And does it not as truly originate them? I introduce this question for the sake of those who dwell much upon the idea that a man must be the *author* of his own actions in order to be accountable.

This question I think may be quickly answered. If by being the author or originator of its affections, is meant that the mind *really exercises* them, or that they are *truly and perfectly the acts of the mind*; then the mind is evidently the author or originator of all its affections as well as its volitions. But if by originating our affections or volitions, is meant that we produce them, or bring them into being, by another act of the mind, — or by any thing in the mind distinct from its affections or volitions; then I contend that there is nothing in the history of our consciousness, which can furnish the least evidence that we do originate our affections or volitions. We are conscious of the acts of our mind, and of nothing else. These acts of the mind have indeed important mutual relations; but as to the affections, it is not a fact that they are produced by other mental acts. The mind, in the circumstances in which it is placed, exercises or puts forth its affections; in view of proper objects or motives it acts in the way of loving, hating, &c. This is the whole history of the case. The mind exists as an agent, rational, free, moral. Under the

influence of its various circumstances, i. e. the objects or inducements presented before it, it acts as it does. This is all that any man ever observed in himself or witnessed in others or read in history ; and all which any man can conceive.

We have now examined the position of Dr. John Taylor, Dr. Ware and others, that the first existence of sin must be the result of previous voluntary determinations or acts of the will, and accordingly that it is inconsistent with the nature of sin that it should exist at the beginning of our existence ; and we have found this position liable to objections in every point of view. The fact is, that moral good and evil, virtue and vice, lie in the affections or mental acts themselves, considered in their own nature. It were easy to prove that this is the case, and that on any other principle there can be no such thing as virtue or vice, holiness or sin, in the universe. But this has been so fully proved by Edwards and others, and is indeed so perfectly obvious to our own consciences, that I shall take it as a settled matter. Here then we come to the conclusion of our reasoning on this point. As soon as a rational being has a disposition or affection which is of a moral nature, he is holy or sinful. Whatever may be the antecedents or circumstances, the occasions or excitements of his disposition or affection, he is worthy of praise or blame as soon as he has it. At its very first existence it is in itself right or wrong.

If it is love to God or benevolence to man, it is right, and he who has it is virtuous and praise-worthy. If it is enmity to God or selfishness, it is wrong, and he who has it is culpable. And a person is as truly worthy of praise or blame for the first moral disposition or affection, as he can be for any subsequent one ; because it is of the same nature. Following affections may be increased in strength, and circumstances may attend them which render them culpable in a higher degree. But the first affection being of the same nature, is as truly culpable as any following affections. The fact of its being first makes no alteration in regard to its desert. So that the doctrine of man's *native* depravity, or his sinfulness from the beginning of his moral existence, is in no way inconsistent with the nature of sin.

CHAPTER VIII.

State of the infant mind. Considerations in favor of supposing that an infant is incapable of moral affections, not conclusive. Reasons in favor of the contrary supposition.

One of the remaining topics which calls for a brief consideration, is *the state of the infant mind*. It seems to be frequently taken for granted that the mind of an infant is incapable of any moral affections, and of course incapable of being in any proper sense sinful or depraved. Many who profess to believe the doctrine of native depravity, understand the subject in this light, and accordingly do not consider real, personal sin as commencing immediately after birth. They do not indeed undertake to say when the infant child begins to exist as a moral agent. And they believe that sin commences as soon as moral agency. But their opinion after all seems to be, that neither sin nor moral agency commences either at the commencement of human existence, or at any time very near it. In regard to such a subject as this, it becomes me

to speak with modesty, and carefully to guard against attempting to be wise above what is written. But while I would not take upon me to assert the truth of any metaphysical theory as to the commence of sin in the human mind, I shall freely inquire whether the opinion above stated is supported by any sufficient reasons.

In my opinion there are no arguments which prove clearly and satisfactorily that the infant mind is incapable of moral emotions; and of course no one has a right to take it for granted that it is so, or to proceed in his reasoning on this assumption.

I shall here just touch upon the reasons which I suppose generally lead men to entertain the opinion referred to, and shall endeavour to show that they are not conclusive.

1. The fact that moral affection is *not apparent* at the beginning of human existence is no certain proof that it does not exist. Suppose moral evil does really exist in the mind from the beginning of life; still the infant could not make it visible before arriving at such bodily and mental improvement and activity as to be able to make known inward feeling by significant outward signs. And this evidently requires a considerable time. We often see in a little child a severe effort to express some strong emotion struggling within, before he has the power to express it. The

fact that it is not expressed by outward signs, is certainly no proof that it does not exist.

2. The *incapacity* of the infant child *to receive particular instruction* from parents and others respecting moral and religious subjects, is no certain proof that he is incapable of moral feeling. The very constitution of his mind, the "law written on his heart," may, without any instruction from others, render him capable of moral feeling. Without any particular instruction, some objects may be perceived, or some things may take place inwardly, which will call forth certain emotions; and these emotions, though existing only in their incipient state and in an exceedingly low degree, may be of such a kind as to be the elements of moral character. No one is authorized to say that the infant mind cannot have such emotions because it is capable of no instruction from without. Indeed the elements of knowledge must of necessity exist in the mind, before it can receive instruction. Instruction on intellectual subjects does not originate the first intellectual acts, but presupposes them, refers to them, and makes use of them. The same is true of moral instruction. It does not originate the first moral emotions, nor communicate the first moral perceptions; but evidently proceeds on the supposition that they already exist. And it is of no small consequence that we should remember this, and should well consider what place

our agency holds in the instruction we give in early life. Much is to be done in the mind before *our* work can begin. There must be various intellectual and moral acts as elements of knowledge, as materials for us to operate upon. Surely then we cannot prove that an infant child has no moral emotions, because he is incapable of receiving instruction from human teachers. He has not yet learned the use of words, nor the meaning of other signs, and so cannot receive knowledge through the medium of words or other signs. But his mind itself, though not capable of receiving instruction in these ways, may be capable of intellectual perceptions, and consequently of moral emotions in regard to the objects perceived; and as these intellectual perceptions are the elements of knowledge, the moral emotions attending them are the elements of moral character.

3. *Our not being able to recollect that we had moral affections in our infancy*, is no certain proof that we had none. The recollection of those acts of our mind which took place in past time, depends much on the strength which our mental faculties had at the time when the acts took place. The mind must make considerable improvement and acquire a considerable measure of strength, before it can retain the impression of its thoughts and feelings for any length of time. A little child often has a memory sufficient to recall his mental acts for a few minutes or

hours; and yet those acts may entirely escape his recollection in after time. Who has power to count up the number of thoughts and feelings which a child evidently has in that early period of life, to which his memory afterwards never can reach? Certainly it can be no sufficient proof of our not having had moral affections in infancy, that we cannot now recollect them. If this want of recollection is a proof that we had no moral affections in infancy, why is it not equally a proof that we had none in childhood for two or three years? Generally we can no more recollect any acts of our mind which took place during the second year of our life, than the second month or day. Evidently then we may have had moral affections from the commencement of life notwithstanding our inability to recall them. When we had them, we may have had a consciousness of them proportional to their strength. But now we can no more recollect that consciousness, than the affections to which it related.

4. The circumstance that an infant child has *no explicit, formal knowledge of God's law*, is no proof that he is incapable of moral affections. A child is without such knowledge till he becomes capable of receiving religious instruction. But how can he receive instruction before he has learned the use of language and other signs through which instruction is communicated? No one can suppose that a child

ordinarily obtains any definite and correct ideas of God and his law during the first two years of his life. But it cannot surely be thought that a child ordinarily lives two years without any wrong feelings. It is often the case that the minds of children are wholly neglected, and that they continue for a long time in ignorance of the character and law of God; or if they have any impressions made on their minds respecting these subjects, the impressions are very erroneous. But who supposes that children, during all the years of their ignorance and error, are incapable of any feelings either right or wrong? And how is it with those who are brought up in heathen darkness, and have no proper conceptions of God and his law? The Apostle tells us, "they are a law to themselves," that "they have the law written on their hearts," i. e. they have the principles of law imprinted on their minds: they have moral faculties and moral perceptions. Their being destitute of any explicit and formal knowledge of God's law does not render them incapable of good and evil, so long as they have a moral nature. And when converts among the heathen review their former lives, they see many of their feelings and actions to have been sinful, though in their heathenish state they thought nothing of them. In view of these things, who is authorized to say that the infant mind is incapable of moral feelings, because it is without any explicit knowledge of

God and his law? Accordingly those passages of Scripture which speak of little children as having no knowledge of good and evil, furnish no conclusive proof that they are incapable of moral affections; because such passages may be understood to speak of children in that comparative sense which is so common in the word of God. Even adult persons, who are evidently sinners, and are spoken of as deserving a degree of punishment, ("few stripes,") are still represented as *not knowing their Lord's will*. They have no such knowledge as others have, — no clear, definite, formal knowledge, which comes from correct religious instruction. And if this may be the case with adult persons, who are acknowledged to be capable, though in a lower degree than others, of sinful feelings and actions, why may it not be the case with infant children? How can their being represented as having no knowledge, certainly prove that this is not the case with them? It must however be kept in mind that, as they are in such a state of ignorance, they are capable of moral affection only in a very low degree. Their emotions must be regarded as only incipient or elementary, having indeed the nature, but far from having the form or the strength, of the emotions belonging to adult years. So the first little shoot which arises from the opening seed, is in nature the same vegetable substance and has the

same vegetable life with the stately oak which it afterwards becomes.

These are the chief considerations which may be adduced to prove that the infant mind is not capable of moral feelings. Few, I think, who give them a careful attention, will think that they amount to a satisfactory proof. And if they do not amount to a satisfactory proof, then certainly no one has a right to affirm that the infant mind is totally incapable of emotions which are of a moral nature, and no one has a right to proceed on the ground of such a position, either in pursuing a course of reasoning or in interpreting the word of God. If a man comes to those passages of Scripture which teach that all are sinners, he cannot properly assume that little children must be excepted on account of their total incapacity of being in any sense morally depraved. To reason in this way would be to assume that which is not self-evident and which cannot be satisfactorily proved.

The position I have here taken is all that the case requires. I have attempted to show that no man can properly assume the incapacity of the infant mind for any emotions which are of a moral nature. This is all that is necessary. It is by no means incumbent on me to produce direct and positive proof of the contrary. For plainly the various declarations of

Scripture as to the universality of sin among the posterity of Adam, must in all propriety be understood as in some sense including little children, unless there are good and sufficient reasons for wholly excepting them. Nevertheless it may perhaps answer some good purpose, and particularly it may show still more clearly the impropriety of making the assumption above mentioned, just to advert to some considerations in favor of supposing that the infant mind is capable of the beginning of moral emotions; leaving it to others to decide what weight these considerations ought to have.

1. The infant is considered by all sober men as having a rational soul, a mind endued with intellectual and moral powers. Is not such a mind, from its very nature, capable of intelligence and moral affection? Besides this, the infant child possesses those bodily organs which are most intimately connected with the mind, and which, under the present constitution of things, are essential to the exercise of thought and feeling. Now the fact that the child is from the beginning possessed of a mind, together with the organs of thought and feeling, would seem to imply that he is capable of thought and feeling, that is, capable of it in some small degree. As a mind exists with its proper bodily organs, how can we suppose that there is any thing which will necessarily prevent

its powers from beginning to unfold themselves in the first stage of life? They must begin to do this sometime. Why may they not begin at the commencement of existence? Is it quite reasonable to suppose that a thing of so active a nature as the mind, endued with all its faculties and its bodily organs, though in a very feeble state, should remain perfectly dormant for days and months; especially when it is considered that there are from the beginning various bodily sensations, which are evidently suited to rouse the mind to action?

2. It agrees best with common analogy to suppose that feeling begins very early, and in a very low and imperceptible degree. The developement of our corporeal powers and of our mental powers generally, begins in this manner. And the same is true of the whole vegetable and animal world.

3. But a very short time passes after the commencement of life, before a child becomes capable of showing some signs of feeling. And have we not reason to suppose that feeling, as well as thought, exists some time before? A child gives early and frequent indications of strong emotions, and strives to utter them long before he is able to do it in the usual way. And is it reasonable to suppose that the very first emotions which exist in the mind, have the same degree of strength with those which are first indicated by outward signs? Is it not rather probable that the

first motion of the heart, the first budding of affection, takes place some time previously, and, by a gradual increase, acquires that degree of strength which it shows, when it begins to express itself by intelligible signs?

4. To suppose that children are in some small degree moral agents from the first, and have incipient moral emotions, agrees best with the general representations of Scripture, and the general aspect of things in divine providence; both of which indicate that the offspring of human parents are human beings, — beings of the same nature with their parents, belonging to the same race, under the same moral administration, and possessing the elements of the same character. All these indications of the word and providence of God would seem quite incongruous, if human beings, for a considerable time after the commencement of their life, were totally destitute of moral affections and moral qualities, and of all present relation to a moral government. But if they are considered as having, from the first, some feeble beginning of moral affection, and of course the beginning of moral character; then the representations of Scripture and the conduct of divine Providence appear perfectly consistent and just. This view of the subject would at once relieve the difficulty which is generally thought to attend the fact that infant children suffer and die. Some suppose they suffer and die as

irrational animals do, without any reference to a moral law or the principles of a moral government. A strange supposition indeed, that *human beings* should for a time be ranked with beings which are not human, that is, mere animals! Children are represented in a very different light in the word of God. Now this strange supposition is made on the assumption, that infant children are capable of no unholy feelings, that they have no personal depravity,—nothing in any degree of the nature of sin. For if they have this even in the lowest degree,—if the eye of God sees in them any emotions, however feeble, which are in their nature wrong, and so are the commencement of a blame-worthy character; then they suffer as other human beings do, on account of sin. And so the affirmations, that “by the offence of one all are constituted sinners,” and that “death comes upon all men because that all have sinned,” are to be taken in their most obvious sense, without excepting any part of the human race. On the same principle, the representation that men are by nature children of wrath, and that no one can see the kingdom of heaven without being born again, is to be understood as applying to all human beings alike. It is indeed generally believed that the representation does apply to infant children *in some sense*; though not a few think it very difficult, if not impossible, to tell in what sense. But if we admit that all men have personal sinfulness

as soon as they are intelligent, moral beings, and that they are intelligent, moral beings from the first, — that they are born so; then they are, in a plain, obvious sense, by *nature*, i. e. by *birth*, *children of wrath*. Being born of sinful parents, they are sinful; and they need the regenerating Spirit of God, as really as others do, to make them holy. And so they come clearly and fully under the dispensation, in which Christ is exhibited as dying for sinners, and saving that which was lost; and the rite of baptism, denoting the reality or the necessity of spiritual purification, may be applied to children with as much propriety as to adults, and prayer may be offered up for the renewal of children by the Spirit with as much propriety as for the renewal of others.

CHAPTER IX.

The infant mind considered as the subject of a *wrong disposition*, or *corrupt nature*. Remarks on the words *disposition*, *propensity*, *nature*, &c. That man has originally a propensity to sin generally held by Orthodox divines. Is this propensity *sinful*? The point at issue between Dr. John Taylor and Edwards. Considerations on both sides. — A united view of the subject.

The particular view of the *infant mind* presented in the preceding chapter, has been maintained by Orthodox divines to a considerable extent.

The candid reader will see that arguments are not wanting in its favor, and that, if found to be true, it would relieve the subject of some of its most serious difficulties.

But there is another view, somewhat different from this, which I shall now particularly exhibit, suggesting the chief reasons in favor of it, and the chief objections against it. My object is not to use strong affirmations, nor to announce confident opinions, but to invite a candid and patient examination. The subject, I am aware, is abstruse, and, in many respects, lies beyond the bounds of our knowledge. We have

neither the *means* of understanding it perfectly, nor the necessary *capacity* for this, whatever means might be afforded us. On such a subject our best conceptions will be likely to be mingled with error, and the conclusions which may now appear to us most certain, may be found, on further inquiry, to result from premises which are partly or wholly false. I would remember these remarks myself; and instead of appearing before the public as a strenuous advocate of any one philosophical theory, exclusively of every other, I would treat the opinions of all wise and good men with respect. And though I have been considering the subject before us for forty years, I would still place myself in company with those who are *inquirers after the truth*, and who are looking for clearer light than has yet shone upon the minds of Christians.

The depravity of man has *commonly* been considered as consisting originally in a *wrong disposition*, or a *corrupt nature*, which is antecedent to any sinful emotions, and from which, as an inward source, all sinful emotions and actions proceed.

In favor of this opinion several things may be offered.

We have occasion, most evidently, for the use of such words as *disposition*, *inclination*, *propensity*, *nature* &c. Were there no such words in our language, we should be sensible of the deficiency, and,

for the purposes of reasoning and common discourse, should be compelled to introduce them. Without words of such import, how could you express what you often wish to express, as to the *habitual character* of an intelligent being? You say, such a man is *avaricious*. But it may be that he is not now putting forth avaricious *acts* of mind. For though a very avaricious man, he may at present be wholly occupied with thoughts and feelings of another kind. But who considers this as a reason for not calling him an avaricious man? What then is your meaning, when you call a man *avaricious*, while his mind is engrossed with other objects, and all avaricious thoughts and feelings are at present excluded? Do you mean merely, that he has indulged avaricious desires and followed avaricious practices *in times past*? But this *alone* would not be a sufficient reason for calling him avaricious *now*; because he may have reformed, and may now possess a better character. Paul was once a persecutor and blasphemer; but he was not so after his conversion. — By calling the man avaricious, do you then mean, that he will certainly have avaricious feelings *hereafter*, when the objects of avaricious desire shall come before his mind? But the mere fact, however certain, that he will have such feelings at a *future time* is manifestly not a sufficient reason for calling him avaricious *now*; because those future feelings may come in conse-

quence of a change in his character. There was a certainty in the divine mind that Adam, though at first holy, would become a sinner. But this surely was no reason for calling him a sinner while he remained holy. It is also a certain fact that some who are impenitent sinners, will hereafter become Christians. But shall we therefore count them among Christians now? — If a man is with propriety called avaricious, it must be on account of something which appertains to his present character. He must either have avaricious feelings at the present time, or at least must have that in his mind from which avaricious feelings will naturally arise. There must be in the state of his mind an aptitude to such feelings, a foundation for such exercises. This aptitude or foundation is the very thing which is commonly called *disposition, propensity, inclination, or principle of action*. Edwards calls it a “principle of nature;” which he explains to be, “that foundation which is laid in nature for any particular kind of exercises, — so that for a man to exert the faculties of his mind in that kind of exercises may be said to be his nature.” Dr. Dwight calls it “a cause of moral action in intelligent beings,” — “a cause, which to us is wholly unknown, except that its existence is proved by its effects.” — “We speak of *human nature as sinful*,” he says, “intending, *not the actual commission of sin*,

but a general characteristic of man, under the influence of which he has committed sins heretofore, and is prepared and prone to commit others." — "With the same meaning in our minds, we use the phrases, *sinful propensity*, *corrupt heart*, *depraved mind*, and the contrary ones." — "When we use these kinds of phraseology, we intend that a reason really exists why one mind will be the subject of holy volitions, and another of sinful ones. We do not intend to assert that any one or any number of the volitions has been or will be, holy or sinful, — nor do we refer immediately to *actual volitions* at all. Instead of this, we mean to indicate a state of mind, out of which holy volitions in one case may be fairly expected to arise, and sinful ones in another : such a state, as that, if it were to be changed, and the existing state of a holy mind were to become the same with that of a sinful mind, its volitions would henceforth be sinful, and vice versa. This *state* is the cause which I have mentioned, a cause the existence of which must be admitted, unless we acknowledge it to be a perfect casualty that any volition is sinful rather than holy." It will be seen that Dwight uses the word *volitions* in the large sense, including the affections or emotions.

To return to the case of the avaricious man. Most certainly it cannot be proper to attribute this character to him, except for that which really belongs

to him *now*,—a present quality or state of his mind. Whatever avaricious feelings may hereafter be excited in his mind ; still, if they do not arise from something improper in the present state of his heart,—if he is now entirely free from all wrong propensity, all aptitude to such feelings ; there would be no justice in calling him avaricious. — Say the man whom you call avaricious, envious, or revengeful, is not now exhibiting that character in any acts of mind ; why do you represent him as sustaining this character ? What do your thoughts fix upon as a reason for applying these epithets to him ? Is it not that very thing, which is commonly called *propensity, disposition, or state of mind* ? Though he is not the subject of any present feelings of avarice, envy, or revenge, his attention being occupied with other things ; he has an invariable propensity towards them, and will at once exercise them, when a favorable opportunity occurs. This disposition or aptitude of mind is that which is commonly regarded as the substance of a man's character.

Now we have abundant evidence that a disposition or propensity to sin, understood as above, exists in the human mind from the beginning ; such a disposition as Dr. Dwight describes in the passage above cited. Some of those writers, who do not fully agree with Dr. Dwight and other Orthodox divines in their reasoning on this point, still hold that man's nature

since the fall is such, that he certainly will sin, and that his nature is the *cause* or *reason* of his sinning. By *nature* I suppose they mean the same as is commonly meant by *disposition*, *propensity*, or *tendency to sin*. It has been the common doctrine of Orthodox churches in this country and in Europe, that all the posterity of Adam are the subjects of *natural depravity*, or *depravity of nature*, or an *inward tendency* or *bias to sin*. This quality or state of mind clearly belongs to man from the commencement of his being; and this is what is more generally intended by *original sin*; although this phrase is frequently meant also to include the fact, that depravity and ruin come upon us as the consequence of Adam's sin. But the particular question with which we are now concerned is, whether this settled, universal propensity to sin in the posterity of Adam may not be the reason why they are denominated sinners, and regarded as such, in the divine administration. To answer this inquiry, let us advert to the principles already laid down. If a man shows a disposition to covetous feelings and practices, we call him a covetous man. And if we could know at the beginning of his life, that he has such a disposition, — a disposition which will uniformly and certainly develope itself in covetous desires and practices; we should say, he has the grand element of a covetous character; he is a *young miser*. And if we

knew that any man had a decided disposition to commit murder, whether he had ever acted it out, or not; we should not hesitate to ascribe to him the character of a *murderer*. We should say, he is a murderer *in heart*, and a murderer *in the sight of God*. And if we had evidence that the whole race of man were born with a disposition to this particular crime, that they were universally inclined to commit murder; we should speak of them as *a race of murderers*; and we should regard them as murderers *virtually*, not only before they had perpetrated any murderous deed, but before they had conceived any direct, formal *purpose* to do it. Their having an *inclination* or *propensity* to such a deed of wickedness would be sufficient to justify us. The same might be said of other particular forms of moral evil. Now there is evidently in every human being, *a disposition to sin*, a state of mind from the beginning of life, which will certainly and uniformly lead him to transgress the divine law, whatever his outward circumstances may be, and whatever causes may operate upon him, either external or internal, except the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit. And the existence from the first of such a disposition in man has generally been thought sufficient to justify us in representing him as by nature depraved, sinful, and lost, and, at the very beginning of his existence, needing regeneration, and all the blessings of redemp-

tion. This view of the subject shows regeneration to be substantially the same thing, at whatever period of life it may take place. It is the giving of *a new heart*. Man's unrenewed heart is, from the beginning, *depraved, unholy, prone to sin*. This is his natural character. The child Jesus was never in any degree prone to sin. He never had any disposition or state of mind that tended to sin in any of its forms. He had "no evil principle,"—"was not at all under the influence of any native depravity."* For any other child to be regenerated, is to be so changed in his disposition or moral nature by the divine Spirit, as to become, in a measure, *like the child Jesus*. The same divine power which gave the Son of Mary a holy nature or disposition at his first birth, can make any other child of a holy nature or disposition by a new birth. 'This every child of Adam needs; and without it no one can be saved. And when any one is renewed in infancy, the change will early show itself in the love of truth, fear of sin, desire of religious instruction, aspiring after God, and other holy exercises.

That such a propensity to sin as I have described, exists in all men from the beginning of their life, and that this constitutes the essence of depravity, has been maintained almost universally by men who have

* Barnes's note on John 14: 30.

embraced the other doctrines of the Orthodox faith. It was held by the ancient Fathers, except one sect, that of the Pelagians. It was and is contained in all the creeds of the Reformed churches, in Europe and America. It was held by Arminius, and is now maintained by the Wesleyan Methodists. Even those in our country who object to some of the expressions and modes of reasoning used by the older Calvinists, still believe it to be a fact, that a disposition or propensity to sin exists in man from the beginning. Dr. Hopkins, whose views on most subjects are very sober and scriptural, speaks of man's being sinful *as soon as he exists*. He holds that our moral corruption takes place "as soon as we become the children of Adam," i. e. "at the beginning of our existence." He speaks too of our being *inclined to sin from the first*. Dr. Dwight maintains that all men "are born sinners;"—"that infants are contaminated in their moral nature, and born in the likeness of apostate Adam;" and speaks of this as what precedes moral action: and with him agree Smalley, Hart, Backus, and the whole body of ministers and Christians in Connecticut who were his contemporaries. And Dr. Nathaniel Taylor has published it as his belief "that all mankind, in consequence of Adam's fall, are *born destitute of holiness*, and are *by nature totally depraved*." Other expressions of his on this subject may explain what he means by being *born destitute*

of holiness, and being by nature totally depraved. Speaking of mankind in their present fallen state, he says: "Such is the *nature* of the human mind, that it becomes the occasion of sin in men in all the appropriate circumstances of their existence." According to him, then, it is *something in the mind itself*, in the very *nature* of the mind, which proves the occasion of sin. He calls this "*a tendency to sin*," and a tendency in the very *nature* of the mind.

Various passages are found in Stuart's able Commentary on the Romans, which assert the same doctrine. He says; "Men are born destitute of all disposition to holiness." He speaks often of the "fallen nature and degenerate condition of Adam's posterity." Of infants he says; "that their natural, unregenerate state is a state of alienation from God, and one which needs the regenerating influence of the divine Spirit; that if they are saved," (which he hopes will be the case,) they must have "a taste" or "relish for the holy joys of heaven implanted in their souls." And he asks: "Is there nothing then which Christ by his Spirit can do for infants, in *implanting such a taste*?" He speaks of those who die before they contract actual guilt in their own persons, and says; "they still need a *new heart* and a *right spirit*," — (just what all sinners need,) not *prospectively*, but *now*. And after making, perhaps inadvertently, some free remarks, which have commonly

been understood to be in opposition to the common doctrine, he takes special care to inform us, that he believes all Adam's posterity to be born into the degenerate state above described, and that he has meant to advance nothing at variance with this doctrine.

We see how general is the belief, that mankind are naturally inclined to sin, that they are born with a tendency to sin, a tendency existing in their very nature, previously to moral action; and that this disposition or tendency constitutes their native state. The question now returns, whether it may not be chiefly with a view to this *degenerate nature* of Adam's posterity, that God speaks of them, and in his government treats them *as sinners*, from the very beginning of their personal existence, and previously to any *actual* transgression. This view of the subject Dr. Dwight particularly maintains in his system of Theology. He rejects the idea that God inflicts such sufferings as infants endure, "on moral beings who are perfectly innocent," and argues from the sufferings and death of infants, "that they are contaminated in their moral nature, and born in the likeness of apostate Adam;" — "a fact," he says, "irresistibly proved, so far as the most unexceptionable analogy can prove any thing, by the depraved moral conduct of every infant who lives so long as to be capable of moral action."

This is the opinion which has generally been maintained by evangelical writers. I bring it forward here as an opinion which is not to be hastily dismissed on account of any speculative difficulties attending it. To say the least, *it may be true*. In our very *nature*, in the state of our minds from the beginning of our existence, God may see a moral contamination, a corrupt propensity, which, in his infallible judgment, renders it just and right for him to treat us as *sinner*s. In the native character of Adam's posterity, there may be that which is of the nature of moral evil, — essentially the same moral evil in God's view, with that which is afterwards made visible to us by its developments. And may it not be on this account principally, that infants suffer and die ?

But there are some who object to calling any thing *sinful*, or *morally corrupt*, except *actual transgression*. They generally admit that man has a disposition or propensity to sin before moral action commences ; but they deny that such propensity is of the nature of moral evil.

This was the main point of controversy between Dr. John Taylor and Edwards. In vol. 6 of his works, (Worcester Edit.) p. 137, Edwards makes a particular statement of the points in which he and Taylor were agreed. He first lays down the general proposition, *that mankind are all naturally in such a state, that they universally run into that which*

is in effect their own utter, eternal perdition. Then he presents it in two parts: 1. That all men come into the world in such a state, that they certainly and universally commit sin; and 2. That all sin exposes to utter destruction, and would end in it, were it not for the interposition of divine grace. In this general proposition above stated, and in these two particular points, Taylor and Edwards were agreed, as Edwards clearly shows. What then was the grand point at issue? It was the doctrine of *innate depravity*. So Edwards says, that the greater part of Taylor's book on the Scripture doctrine of original sin is against the doctrine of *innate depravity*. And Taylor speaks of the conveyance of *a corrupt and sinful nature* to Adam's posterity, as the grand point to be proved by the maintainers of the doctrine of original sin. That all men have from the first *a corrupt and sinful nature*, is what Edwards undertakes to prove in opposition to the system of Dr. John Taylor. I mention this as an interesting historical fact. And if any one wishes to get a just and adequate view of the controversy which has recently shown itself on this subject, he will find it specially important to make himself familiar with the writings of Edwards and Dr. John Taylor, on the same subject; and he will do well to trace the controversy back to the days of Augustine and Pelagius. Of all the books which have ever

been written against the doctrine of native depravity, that of Dr. John Taylor exhibits the greatest adroitness, and the most taking plausibility.

The subject now introduced, is one which I cannot discuss at large, without going far beyond my limits. I must content myself, therefore, with suggesting a few things on one side and the other of the question at issue, for the sake merely of aiding the contemplations of the reader.

In favor of the opinion that man's original nature or propensity to sin, is not morally evil and corrupt, and that nothing can be called *sin* or *sinful*, but *actual transgression*, it may be said, (1.) That this agrees with the fair import of the divine law, which requires nothing but *right exercise* or *action*, i. e. love to God and our neighbour, and forbids nothing but the opposite. So an Apostle defines sin to be *a transgression of the law*. (2.) It may be said, that this agrees with our *consciousness*. We never blame ourselves for any thing of which we are not conscious, and we are conscious of nothing but the exercises of our own minds. (3.) It may be said, too, that we cannot be accounted guilty, except for that which is *voluntary*; and that, as the disposition referred to, precedes all voluntary action, it cannot be considered as blame-worthy. These arguments may be expressed in few words. Such is human consciousness,

such our conception of moral good and evil, and such the divine law, that nothing but action can be considered as holiness or sin.

To these arguments the following reply may be given.

1. When the Apostle John describes sin to be, as it is rendered in the common version, "a transgression of the law," he uses the word *avopia*, which has not so exclusively an *active* sense, as is sometimes thought. It may mean not only *actual, positive transgression* of law, but, as our Catechism well expresses it, "a want of conformity to law." If we are destitute of any thing which we should have in a state of perfect conformity with the law, we are chargeable with *avopia*. Now what is the meaning of the expression, almost universally adopted by Christian divines, that man is *born destitute of holiness*? Holiness is conformity to the divine law. And if man is naturally destitute of holiness, he is destitute of conformity to the law. But this cannot with any propriety be said of one who is not in any sense under law. And if one is under law, and is destitute of conformity to law, he is *avomos*, a sinner. Now is not a *disposition* to holiness something which belongs to man in a state of moral rectitude? Did it not belong to Adam at the beginning of his existence? Did it not belong to Jesus from the first? No intelligent, moral being can be destitute of such a disposition

without being morally depraved — without being virtually a sinner. It is the united opinion of the great body of Christian commentators and divines, from the Reformation to the present time, that men come into the world in a state of moral pollution. Barnes, who has published the last commentary of which I have any knowledge, speaks familiarly of our “being born with a corrupt disposition,” and of our “*nature*” as being “corrupt.”* Unquestionably he means to speak of a *moral*, and not of a *physical* corruption. Such a *moral corruption* seems to be naturally implied in the language of all those who represent men at the beginning of their existence as *destitute of holiness*, as *born destitute of all disposition to holiness*, as the subjects of a *fallen nature*, &c. This destitution of holiness in moral beings, — in other words, this *want of conformity to the law*, may, it is thought, be fairly included in the word *avouia*, which the Apostle uses to describe sin.

2. It may be a serious question, whether *consciousness* does not, in an important sense, extend farther than to intellectual and moral exercise. Who doubts that we are conscious of *existence*? And yet is not our existence something different from exercise or action? Does it not *precede* action? How then do we become conscious of existence? We become

* See his Notes on Rom. 5.

conscious of it, only *as it is developed in action*. Who doubts that we are conscious of the faculty of thinking, remembering, loving, willing, &c. ? And yet it is manifest that we are not conscious of these faculties, except as they are brought to view by their exercise. It is very common to speak of our having a consciousness of a *power* or *ability* to do this or that ; though we are conscious of having the power only by its exercise. It is very suitable to speak of *consciousness* in such a case, though it is not *immediate* or *direct* consciousness. Why should consciousness be thought any the less real, because we come to have it by means of exercise ?

It is customary to use the same language respecting a *disposition* or *propensity*. We say, a man is conscious of having a revengeful disposition, or of a benevolent, compassionate disposition, or of a propensity to covetousness, though he cannot be conscious of one or the other, except as it is developed in the feelings and acts of his mind. Now if a man is in this way conscious of a disposition to benevolence, does not a sentiment of self-approval arise within him ? And if he is conscious of a propensity to covetousness or revenge, does not a sentiment of self-disapproval arise ? Men generally regard a settled *disposition* in regard to moral objects, as the substance of all that they mean by character, whether good or bad.

If then we are conscious, in the manner just stated, of what we call disposition or propensity, and if we do really ascribe this to ourselves, as virtually containing whatever goes to constitute character; may it not be true, that in some analogous sense, the original disposition or native propensity of man to sin, is to be regarded as the basis or chief element of his character? May we not, in our reflections, trace back the sinful feelings and actions of childhood and youth to this native disposition, and thus become, in the manner above described, *conscious* of such a disposition? And may not this disposition, developed and made visible to consciousness by subsequent sinful action, be as properly considered to be morally wrong, as a disposition to covetousness or revenge which any adult person now has, and which he will hereafter develop in action, and which he has already begun to develop? In other words, may not the original native disposition to sin be essentially of the same nature, though not existing in the same degree of strength, with the disposition to sin which a man has at any time in after life, when he is not *actually sinning*?

The view which has been presented is the one which has been generally entertained by Orthodox divines. And does it not agree with plain common sense? Ask any one, who has learnt the use of lan-

guage, and who judges of things naturally, whether a disposition to do wrong is not a *wrong disposition*? Inquire what he means when he says, a man has a *bad disposition*; and you will find his meaning to be, that the man has a disposition to do *bad actions*. The disposition is characterized by the actions to which it leads. You may say, the character then belongs to the disposition only in a *relative* sense. Be it so. A *relative* sense may be a very *proper* and *important* sense. If you object to expressions, because they contain words which have only a relative sense, you would object to a great part of the expressions in common use.

The application of epithets denoting a moral quality, to the disposition or propensity which *originally* belongs to man, is analogous to our usual practice in other cases similar to this. A disposition to benevolent acts, though not now in exercise, is called a *benevolent* disposition; a disposition to revenge, a *vengeful* disposition; a disposition to honesty, an *honest* disposition; and a disposition to feelings of envy, an *envious* disposition. In these and various other instances, epithets denoting moral qualities are familiarly applied to the dispositions of men, although it is understood that those dispositions are not at the time developed in any kind of action. And if every other disposition may properly be characterized from

the feelings and actions to which it leads ; why may not a disposition to *sin* ? And if a disposition to sin in one period of our life may be called a *sinful* disposition, why not in another period ? If in after life, why not in the beginning of life ?

See how the case would stand, if we should take the opposite ground. According to this, a man has a disposition to *do wrong*, but his *disposition* is *not wrong* ; a disposition to *envy*, but his disposition is *not envious* ; a disposition to *revenge*, but his disposition is *not revengeful* ; a disposition to commit *theft*, but his disposition is *not at all thievish* ; a disposition to acts of *piety*, but his disposition is *not pious* ; — and finally, a disposition to commit sin, but his disposition is *not at all sinful*. The same appears in regard to the word *propensity*, *inclination*, *heart*, or *nature*. Thus a man has a strong propensity to *avarice*, but not an *avaricious propensity* ; an inclination to do *wrong*, but not a *wrong inclination* ; a heart to *disobey* God, but not a *disobedient heart* ; a nature to *sin*, but not a *sinful nature*. A man governed by common sense, will pronounce all this to be a series of self-contradictions. And so it is in fact.

On this subject the Scriptures fully justify the common modes of speech. They represent the tree that bears *good fruit* to be a *good tree* ; and the tree that bears *corrupt fruit* to be a *corrupt tree*. They

speak of a heart which devises *liberal things*, or leads to acts of *liberality*, as a "*liberal heart* ; of a heart from which feelings and acts of purity proceed, as a "*pure heart* ;" of a heart which leads to *evil deeds*, as an "*evil heart* ;" of a heart which receives the truth and puts forth *honest and good desires and purposes*, as "*an honest and good heart* ;" and of the heart of man generally, which prompts *deceitful and wicked exercises and practices*, as a "*deceitful and wicked heart*." They represent that *treasure* of the heart from which good things are brought forth, to be a "*good treasure* ;" and that treasure from which evil things are brought forth, to be an "*evil treasure*." That "*heart*" means something which precedes moral exercises, is evident from Matt. 15: 19; in which moral exercises, even "*thoughts*," are said to *come forth out of* the heart. "For out of the heart proceed evil *thoughts*, murders, adulteries, &c." Now the heart from which "*evil thoughts*," and these various forms of wickedness come forth, is the heart which in Scripture is called *wicked, deceitful, unclean*. On the same ground, that is called a "*carnal mind*," from which carnal thoughts and desires proceed.

In all the cases above mentioned, and in others of like kind, common use sanctions the propriety of characterizing the *disposition, inclination, propensity, heart, &c.*, from those feelings and actions which

naturally proceed from it. If those feelings and actions are right, the disposition which leads to them is right; if wrong, the disposition is wrong.

I might show that the same modes of speech respecting the application of epithets, are found in the Bible, and in common discourse, respecting other subjects. Thus the *law*, which requires *holy actions*, is a *holy law*; and a law which leads to *unjust* and *cruel* actions, is an *unjust* and *cruel* law. Now the divine *law* is not *action*, and yet it is a *moral law*, and is *holy* and *good*, and deserves our approbation. An *unjust* law is not *action*; still we say, it is *unjust*, and deserves our *disapprobation*. Such is the common mode of speaking, and such it will be. If you say, the words *holy*, *unjust*, &c., in such cases, are used in a relative sense; I have only to reply, that the sense is indeed *relative*, but none the less *real* or *important*.

But is there not a difference between what we call disposition in a person of adult years, whose state of mind is the result of repeated moral acts, and what we call disposition, before moral action has commenced? Undoubtedly there is a difference as to the degree of strength, and as to the degree in which moral qualities may properly be predicated of it, or rather of the person who possesses it. There is a difference as to other circumstances also. But in some respects there is a manifest similarity. In both

cases, the disposition equally *precedes* action. In both cases it equally *produces* action and *developes itself in* action. In both cases, therefore, it has the same relation to action. Accordingly it has, in both cases, the same bearing upon the position, that nothing but action can be denominated morally good or bad. There is, then, a similarity as to the main points. Now if it is proper to attribute moral qualities to *disposition* as it exists in an adult agent, who is not at the time developing his disposition in action; why is it not proper to attribute moral qualities to disposition, as it exists in the mind before moral action has commenced? In both cases it is equally distinct from moral action, and equally develops itself in moral action. In both cases, it has, of course, the same kind of relation to the exercises which arise from it.

Such considerations as these have occurred to me in favor of the common opinion. And there is one more consideration, which may perhaps appear more important than any other, because it is more practical; namely, that the opposite opinion has a manifest tendency to prevent a just impression of the evil of sin. If men believe that a *disposition to transgress*, is not morally wrong, they will be very likely to infer, that *transgression itself* is not morally wrong. Who can think that an act is wrong when *the disposition* from which it proceeds, is not wrong? that an act is criminal, when a *propensity* to that act

is perfectly innocent? How utterly abhorrent would it be to conscience, common sense, and piety, to tell men, that their propensity to lie, and steal, and murder, has nothing in it which is in the least degree faulty! that their disposition to forget God and disobey his law is not at all sinful, and cannot be looked upon with any disapprobation! What would be the natural influence of this view of the subject upon the minds of men? Would it be likely to produce in them a deep conviction of sin, such as David expressed in the 51st Psalm, and Paul in the 5th and 7th chapters of his epistle to the Romans? Would it make them feel the inexpressible evil of a "carnal mind," and a "heart of stone," and the necessity of its being taken away by the regenerating power of God? Would it lead them fervently to pray, that God would create in them a new heart and a right spirit? Who will labor most to resist and overcome his propensity to wicked courses,—he that regards it as innocent, or he that regards it as criminal and hateful? Will it not be very natural for any one to say; if my disposition to transgress the divine law has nothing sinful in it, why should I be solicitous to be rid of it? Can I be bound in duty to take pains to subdue that, which has nothing wrong in it? Can I be blamed for having a propensity which is not blame-worthy? There would be very good reason why I should earnestly pray God to subdue a disposition, which I felt to be

morally wrong and culpable. But it is not easy to see why I should be earnest in prayer to God, that he would subdue a disposition which is not wrong? On the whole, what kind of advantage can there be in the sentiment, that a disposition to do wrong is not of a moral nature? Will sinners be more likely to repent, and to get rid of the infallible propensity of their hearts to sin, because you call that propensity by a soft name? The existence of such a propensity in the heart, is a hateful and dangerous thing. Will you make it any the less so by calling it innocent?

I have endeavoured to point out what would be the natural result of the opinion, that a propensity to sin is not sinful. If any who advance this opinion, have a meaning in their own minds, which would not lead to such a result, that meaning is too recondite for common apprehension. It is certain that all the usual modes of speech in relation to this subject, imply, that a *propensity* partakes of the same moral quality with the acts which proceed from it; that a *disposition* is wrong, if it prompts to wrong conduct, and *because* it does so; in other words, that *the nature of the disposition is determined from the nature of the exercises and actions to which it leads*. This is all implied in the common forms of speech, and in the common forms of thought. And it is a well-known fact, that the more men's understanding becomes enlightened by divine truth, and the more their

conscience is awakened to do its office, the more thoroughly are they convinced of the sinfulness of their *disposition* to depart from God, and the more desirous are they of that divine influence which can remove it. When men are led to consider their ways, it is generally the case that their minds are first occupied with their overt acts of wickedness. But if they are taught of God, they come in the end to a deep and humbling conviction of the moral turpitude of that constant *disposition*, which they find within them, to forsake the way of holiness and pursue forbidden objects. Once, in a state of moral insensibility, they saw little or no evil in their disposition to sin; perhaps they justified it. Now they look upon it as the essence of evil. It is on account of this urgent propensity to do wrong, this *sin which dwelleth in them*, that they most heartily abhor themselves. And when they pray to God most importunately, it is, that they may be delivered from this "law of sin," this "carnal mind," this "body of death," this sum of all that is vile and hateful. Now if any one comes forward and advances the opinion, that a disposition or propensity to sin is not in any respect sinful, does he not set himself, however unintentionally, in opposition to the most spiritual convictions of Christians? And does he not teach that, which the worst men wish to be true, and which, if they can believe it to be true, will help them to keep their consciences quiet

in an unregenerate state? In a word, whatever else such a man may teach and do to benefit the souls of men, will not the natural influence of this opinion be, to hinder the conviction and conversion of sinners?

I shall just advert to another argument against the opinion, that a propensity to sin is not sinful.

It has been the common belief of Orthodox divines and Christians, that one of the most important things which the special influence of the Spirit accomplishes, is, to take away the *natural propensity* which men have to sin, and to give them a *disposition* to love and obey God. Now if a uniform and infallible propensity to sin is not sinful, then why should we suppose that regeneration takes it away? Regeneration, it would seem, must act upon man as a *moral* being, and remove that which is *morally wrong*. The rest may be left as it was. We should verily think, then, according to the opinion sometimes advanced, that a sinner may be regenerated, and still have the same uniform propensity to sin as before; and that his sanctification, relating as it does to what is moral, may go on, and that he may become perfect in holiness, and still retain his *sinless disposition to commit sin*. Why not? Surely holiness cannot be supposed incompatible with any of the *innocent* propensities of our nature.

After all, it must be acknowledged, that the natural propensity which men have to sin *must* be subdued, and finally taken away, by the sanctifying influence of the Spirit. And, so far as I can understand the matter, the reason why certain writers do not represent the removal of man's propensity to sin as an essential part of regeneration, is, that they first adopt the principle, that nothing is morally good or evil, but action, (mental action,) and then, as regeneration is a *moral change*, conclude that it can relate only to action, and can have nothing to do with any disposition or principle in the mind which precedes action, lest somehow it should come to be more or less a *physical change*. But whatever may be said on this point, it must be evident, that regeneration would be of little worth, should it leave the regenerated person still under the influence of his natural and uniform propensity to sin. Accordingly, those who say that this propensity to sin is not morally wrong, must, after all, so shape the matter, that what is called regeneration, though relating, as they think, only to action, shall, in some way or other, remove the natural *propensity*. And then it will indeed follow, on the principles which they adopt, that regeneration is, in part at least, a *physical change*, inasmuch as it removes a propensity which *they* say is not of a moral nature. But all who think soberly will see, that the renewing influence of the Spirit, whether called moral

or physical, *must* take away a man's governing propensity to sin, or he would need to be changed again by some other influence, in order that he might be prepared to obey God,—unless indeed he can truly obey God, while he has a uniform propensity to disobey. I repeat it, man's natural propensity to sin *must be removed*;—yes, however it may be covered over by gentle epithets, it is a great and destructive evil, and must be removed by the renewing of the Holy Ghost, or it will bring certain ruin upon the soul. And if any one should still represent, that the great and only thing that is necessary, is, that the *actions* should be made right, and that we need the influence of the Spirit solely to make them right; this representation would require the words of our Saviour, — “Make the *tree* good and the *fruit* will be good also,” to be so altered as to read thus; make the *fruit* good, “and the fruit will be good also.” The fruit would no longer show what the tree is. For though the fruit might be good, the tree might still be bad. And the badness of the tree would be of no particular consequence, and might very safely remain, there being no kind of necessity, either first or last, to make the *tree* good, in order to have good fruit.

In the extended remarks which I have made on this subject, it has been my aim to do justice to the particular theory under consideration, and to say what may be said in its defence. This theory has been

generally regarded, and has here been treated, as different from that which was presented in the last chapter. In some respects it is different. But we know that, in many cases, two theories which are in some respects different, and which are supposed by many to be opposite to each other, will, on thorough examination, be found to be not only consistent with each other, but to be merely different views of one and the same thing. I may survey an object from one position, and see it on one side, while you survey it from another position, and see it on another side. Confining ourselves respectively to these first views, we may charge each other with mistake; and you may contend for your own particular view, and I for mine, as *exclusively* true. And exclusively true it would really be, if the object before us had no other side but that which you survey, or that which I survey. But if you and I should change positions, and turn our eye towards the same object on different sides, we should come to a different conclusion. We should not indeed give up our former views as false. But we should add other views, and should modify our former views, just so far as our additional views required. One great mistake we should indeed correct, that is, our supposing that the subject had only one side, and that the particular view we respectively took of it, was the only one which could be taken. The final result would be, that by a farther

examination, — by going beyond our former partial views, and enlarging our knowledge, we should be satisfied, that each of the different views which we first took of the subject, had a portion of truth; that those views which once seemed to clash with each other, are perfectly consistent; that our opposition to each other arose from our limited knowledge; and that our examination of other parts of the subject has not only increased our knowledge, but has given greater clearness and correctness to the particular views which we first had. Locke happily illustrates this point. Speaking of “three miscarriages” that men are chargeable with in reference to the use of their reason, he says: “The third sort is of those who sincerely follow reason, but for want of that which one may call *large, sound, round-about sense*, have not a full view of all that relates to the question. We are all short-sighted, and very often see but one side of a matter: our views are not extended to all that has connection with it. We see but in part; — and therefore it is no wonder we conclude not right from our partial views. This might instruct the proudest esteemer of his own parts, how useful it is to talk and consult with others. For since no one sees all, and we generally have different prospects of the same thing according to our different positions, — it is not beneath any man to try whether another may not have notions of things which have escaped him, and

which his reason would make use of, if they came into his mind."

That view of the subject under consideration which, on the whole, seems most nearly to accord with the representations of Scripture, and with our own consciousness, is one which substantially unites the two theories, presented in these two chapters. It may be thus exhibited.

The *moral nature* or *disposition* of man, though, in our way of contemplating it, *distinct* from action, mental as well as bodily, and though evidently presupposed in action, does *not* exist in such a manner, that it can be considered and treated as *in fact separate from action*. What I mean is, that *there is no such thing as a moral being who is actually treated as a subject of retribution, while his moral nature is not in any way developed in holy or unholy action*. The very idea of a moral agent *receiving* retribution, implies the exercise of his moral faculties, the acting out of his disposition. That any one can enjoy good, or suffer evil, without mental action, is inconceivable. I say, then, that there can be no such thing as reward or punishment actually dispensed to a moral being, whose heart is not developed in some kind of exercise. The disposition, the moral nature does indeed exist; it is a reality; and God is perfectly acquainted with it, before it is made known by action. But it cannot be known to created

beings, not even to him who is the subject of it, except *as manifested in external or internal action*. It cannot, in any other way, become a matter of consciousness. And as it can never be known, it can never be recompensed, aside from its outgoings in action. But what if a human being dies, before his moral nature is in any degree developed? I answer; if he exists in another state, he will doubtless act out his disposition there. As soon as he has opportunity, he will, if unrenewed, show himself to be a sinner, and will thus make it manifest, that his character was stamped for eternity by his descent from apostate Adam. The disposition certainly leading to sin, existed in him from the first; and it would have acted itself out in the *present* life, had opportunity been given. But the want of opportunity does not alter the disposition. Opportunity however is shortly given. Soon after death,—no one can tell how soon,—the character of the unrenewed mind is exhibited in sinful feelings and actions. If regeneration takes place, which Professor Stuart, in common with all Orthodox divines, represents as indispensable to salvation even in infancy; then the new-born child, dying before there is any opportunity to develope his renewed nature in moral exercises, will doubtless have a speedy opportunity to develope them after death, and will spontaneously love what is holy, and hate what is sinful.

There may seem to be an inconsistency between these last remarks, and the Scripture doctrine of retribution. But the inconsistency may be only apparent. The Scriptures teach, that men shall be rewarded *according to the deeds done in the body*. This is unquestionably the general rule. It is the rule in respect to all those to whom it can apply ; that is, to all who have had opportunity to do any deeds in the body. To these, of course, it must be limited ; on the same principle that faith in Christ, as a condition of salvation, is in Scripture required of *all* men, without any express limitation ; whereas it is universally admitted, that the requisition must be limited to those who are capable of exercising faith. Of others faith cannot be required. The rule of judgment, as expressed in Scripture, must be considered as the *universal* rule, in regard to those to whom it can be applied. And even as to others, the *principle* involved in this rule will be observed, though, of course, in a manner suited to their condition. If there are those who die without having made any development of their native disposition by moral exercises, what can be reasonably supposed, but that they will be treated in the world of spirits according to the character which they will *there* exhibit ? The principles of moral government manifested in such a proceeding, are, it would seem, essentially the same, as those which are manifested by carrying into effect the

common rule of recompensing men according to the deeds done in the body, that is, according to the characters they exhibit in the present life?

This then is the manner of contemplating the subject before us, which I would recommend to the careful consideration of thinking men. And though I would not be confident, that I have reached the theory which is exactly right, I wish it may be made a subject of impartial inquiry, whether this, or something like this, is not conformed to truth: to wit: The native disposition to sin is not to be regarded as actually standing alone. There is no such thing as a human being, a subject of government, coming into existence with the corrupt propensity which every child of Adam has, and continuing to exist for any considerable time, without some movements of mind indicating that propensity. Should any one be in this predicament, and *while* he is in it, we cannot see how he can be treated as a subject of moral retribution. I have introduced the supposition merely to show what I mean by saying, that the sinful disposition of man is not intended to be separate, and cannot be considered and treated as separate from moral action. Though his disposition is wrong, (wrong *as a disposition*,) he is still to be treated according to his *actions*,—his actions being the true expression of his disposition. His being treated *according to his*

actions, is then, after all, the same thing as being treated *according to his disposition*. The former is made the express rule of the divine conduct towards man, for the obvious reason, that actions are directly visible to conscience, and can be compared with law by the subjects of law, and so are the proper grounds of recompense. In the divine government, then, *disposition* is in fact treated as morally wrong, only as developed in action, and as thus made visible to those who are the subjects of that government. We cannot doubt that a government which is addressed to conscience, must be administered in this manner. And when Calvin spoke of our natural pravity as deserving the divine vengeance, must he not have intended to speak of it *as developed in moral action*?

Evidently then, the two views which have been taken of the subject in this and the last chapter need not be regarded as opposite and clashing views. They are only different views of the same subject, contemplated under different aspects. Man, at the commencement of his existence, is, according to one view, characterized from his *disposition*, and is regarded as a sinner as soon as he is born, on account of his *invariable propensity to sin*. But then, according to the other view, this propensity to sin is inseparably connected with sinful emotion, and is soon followed by it, if not in every instance before death, doubtless immediately after. The temper of the mind is thus developed, and the

way prepared for a retribution which all will see to be just. On one scheme, man is judged according to his *actions* ; on the other, according to his *disposition as developed in actions*. And what is the difference? If the *disposition* is pronounced to be sinful, it is pronounced to be so *relatively* to the action to which it leads. And if the *action* is pronounced sinful, it is relatively to the mind, and the disposition of mind, from which it proceeds. Each is invariably related to the other, and in our sober contemplations, and in the nature of the case, each is involved in the other. If any man ascribes moral qualities to either, as entirely separate from the other, he is mistaken. He does not follow the nature of things. And if any one confines his attention to either, exclusively of the other, does he not betray the want of enlargement in his habits of thinking? And let me add, if any one forgets that all moral attributes and qualities do, in strict propriety, belong to the intelligent *person*, the *agent himself*, and are to be ascribed to him, and to him only, he forgets an obvious and essential truth ; and forgets it, so far as I can see, for no other reason, than because it is so obvious. Most clearly it is *the mind*, or rather *the man himself*, that is *sinful*. Man, a being whose nature is essentially active, has this character. He is sinful. And this sinful being acts ; and being sinful himself, he acts sinfully. This is the sum of the whole matter.

And now, candid reader, if you find that I have in any instance written particular passages, which, taken by themselves, seem to be erroneous or defective; let the general current of thought, as far as may be, help to correct the error, or supply the defect. You cannot but be sensible, that some parts of the subject which I have presumed to discuss, are involved in great obscurity, and that it is almost impossible for us to say any thing respecting them, without the danger of falling into some mistake ourselves, or of being misapprehended by others. In regard to any representations or reasonings which may appear inconsistent with each other, I have only to say, that I have sometimes aimed to exhibit such considerations as might suggest themselves to my mind, either in favor of a particular point, or against it, without expressing and sometimes without *having* any decided opinion of my own. And I have done this for the purpose of inducing others to examine the subject for themselves. Further: you will perceive that I am as liable as other men, to take different and seemingly opposite views of a subject, in consequence of contemplating it from different positions, or in different relations. In such cases, you will, I hope, endeavour to find out a candid and fair construction of what is written, such as you would think due to yourself in like circumstances. But let nothing prevent you from guarding with the utmost watchfulness, against any error, and against whatever

might tend to error, in this performance. There is no sentiment more deeply fixed in my mind, than that my views of every subject are very limited, and that on such a subject as that which is brought forward in this Essay, it would be inexcusable presumption in me to think myself free from mistakes. The subject is encompassed with difficulties which I pretend not to be able to solve. Objections will doubtless arise in your mind, against what I have written, particularly in these two chapters. I could urge objections myself; and would gladly take my place at the feet of any man, who could satisfactorily answer them. But where shall I find the man who is qualified to do this? We ought always to approach this subject with an humble mind, remembering that the natural and total depravity of which we speak, belongs to us, and striving with all diligence to be rid of that prejudice against the truth, which is one of the most common inmates of the depraved heart. What becomes us in these circumstances is, not dispute and strife, but serious, earnest inquiry after the truth, pursued with patient, persevering labor, with kindness towards those who differ from us, with a cordial readiness to be convinced, and with prayer to God for the guidance of his Spirit. If we inquire after the truth in such a manner, we shall obtain good to ourselves, and shall contribute to the good of others, though our inquiries may for the present fail of complete success. We

have the comfort to believe, that the knowledge which Christians have of divine truth is progressive. It will undoubtedly be growing in clearness and comprehensiveness, to the end of time, and forever. When Christians come to associate profound humility, unquenchable zeal for improvement, and the spirit of prayer, with the exercise of their mental powers, they will soon outgrow their errors, and their intellectual and moral littleness, and speed their way towards a state of perfection. And if, even after attaining to the perfection of that higher state to which they now aspire, they find, as they doubtless will, that some subjects or parts of subjects lie beyond the reach of their intelligence ; their very perfection will teach them to acquiesce in their ignorance.

CHAPTER X.

Remarks on the words *innate, transmitted, hereditary, constitutional, imputed.*

It would accord best with my views of what is proper and useful, to confine my remarks and reasonings to the doctrine of human depravity, just as it stands in the Bible, and to its practical uses, avoiding altogether the discussion of the abstruse, metaphysical questions which are everywhere agitated at the present day. I cannot but approve the sentiment of Howe in the following passage, taken from his *LIVING TEMPLE*. "As for them that could never have the gospel, or *infants* incapable of receiving it, we must consider the Holy Scriptures were written for those that could use them, not for those that could not; therefore to have inserted in them an account of God's methods of dispensation towards such, had only served to gratify the curious and unconcerned, not to instruct and benefit such as were concerned. And it well became hereupon the accurate wisdom of God, not herein to indulge the vanity and folly of men." But

as men cannot be kept from agitating questions of a metaphysical nature on this subject, and as many of the opinions which they form, are, in my apprehension, not only erroneous, but of hurtful tendency; I have thought it expedient to join with them for a time, in the consideration of these speculative matters, and to endeavour to show, that there is nothing in the results of thorough philosophical investigation, which is at all unfavorable to the commonly received doctrine of human corruption.

Before closing this Essay, it seems necessary that I make a few remarks on the meaning of the words *innate*, *transmitted*, *hereditary*, *constitutional*, &c. and on the propriety of applying them to the depravity of man.

The word *innate*, together with the words which Johnson uses to explain it, are applied as freely to the qualities of the mind, as to any thing which pertains to the body. Thus writers speak of *innate integrity*, *innate eloquence*, *inborn passions*, *inborn worth*, *inbred affection*, &c. *Innate* is opposed to the word *superadded*, which in this case would denote something which does not arise from any thing in man's nature, or from what he is by birth. If depravity belongs to man in the state in which he is born; if a foundation is laid for his sinning in his very nature; it is perfectly suitable to call his depravity *innate*. To say that man is born destitute of holiness, and with a propen-

sity to sin, is the same as to say, that man's destitution of holiness, or his propensity to sin, is innate ; in other words, that it is *natural*.

The word *connate* is seldom used at the present day ; although there would seem to be no special objection against it. For how can man's depravity, or propensity to sin, be *innate*, born *in* him, without being *connate*, that is, born *with* him ?

Hereditary means, descended from an ancestor ; transmitted from a parent to a child. Now is it not a plain matter of fact, that a depraved nature, a propensity to sin, has descended from the common ancestor of our race to all his posterity, that it is transmitted from parent to child ? Are we not "degenerate plants of a strange vine ?" And if depravity comes in this way, what impropriety is there in calling it *hereditary* ?

I beg leave in this place to offer a few more remarks on the doctrine universally maintained by the Orthodox, namely, *that we are depraved and lost in consequence of the offence of Adam*. Let us inquire in what way Adam's apostacy produced such an effect upon his posterity.

First ; *was his transgression so charged to his posterity, that they are subjected to suffering on account of it, while they themselves have no sin, or, at most, none which is the ground of their suffer-*

ings? My reasoning here will relate exclusively to that period of life which precedes any sinful exercises. Because as soon as we have exercises, however feeble, which constitute actual sin, no one supposes that we suffer *solely* on account of Adam's sin. In regard to the first period of our infancy, there are two suppositions to be here considered; one is, that we have a *sinful nature, a corrupt moral propensity*; the other, that we have nothing which is in any respect or in any degree of the nature of sin; that we are free from moral depravity. Those who believe in the doctrine of *imputation* in the strictest sense, hold the former of these suppositions — namely, that we have from the beginning a vitiosity of nature. Now what reason can they have to deny, that in the infliction of evil upon us in infancy, God has a respect to our moral corruption? Can they be sure, that our depravity is of no consideration with God in respect to our sufferings at the beginning of life, and that he brings them upon us on account of Adam's sin, and on that account *exclusively*? It may indeed be true that we suffer at that time on account of the offence of him who was the head, and, in an important sense, the representative of our race. And it may also be true, that we suffer on account of that moral corruption which belongs to us from the first. God may have respect to each of these in the sufferings to which he subjects us in early infancy. And he may have

respect to one as the primary reason, and to the other as the secondary or subordinate reason. Or he may have respect to both alike, as co-ordinate and equal reasons. Doubtless he has respect to *something* as a reason for so important a proceeding in his government. And if we judge from the Bible, and from observation, we shall, I think, be satisfied that either Adam's offence, or our native sinfulness, or both together, must constitute the reason. And considering what the Apostle teaches in Rom. v. how can we set aside Adam's sin, and say, that it is not at all on that account, that suffering and death come upon infants? And admitting the fact, that we have from the first a sinful nature, how can we set aside this, and say with confidence, that it is not at all on this account, but wholly and exclusively on account of Adam's offence, that suffering comes upon infants? Can we be certain, that they would suffer as they do, if they were not the subjects of a moral corruption?

I proceed now to the second supposition above named, — *that at the beginning of life, we are free from moral depravity,—that we have nothing which is of the nature of sin.* All agree, that children at the beginning of life, are subjected to various sufferings; and I should think all would agree, that they are subjected to these sufferings for *some reason*. But what is that reason? On what account do they

suffer, they being considered entirely free from moral pollution? Is suffering brought upon them in the way of *moral discipline*, for their benefit? But how can this be, when, according to the supposition, they are not intelligent, moral agents, and of course are not capable of moral discipline? Is suffering brought upon them, then, by way of *anticipation*, on account of the sins which they *will* commit, when they become moral agents? In other words, is it a punishment for sin *prospectively*? Let any man judge whether this can be made consistent with our ideas of law or justice?—Is suffering, then, brought upon infant children, as a *preventive* of sin? But if this were the design of it, should we not suppose that in some instances it would actually *be* a preventive?—Does the Bible then give us any instruction, does it bring out any principle, which can aid our inquiries on this subject, and show us why it is that suffering comes upon infant children? When I search the Bible, I find that God lays it down in the decalogue, as a standing principle, that he “visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children.” And the history of the divine dispensations clearly shows that, to a greater or less extent, he acts on this principle. And I find something which appears to be still more directly to the purpose in Chap. v. of the epistle to the Romans. In this place I am told, that it is *through the offence of Adam* that his posterity die; that *by one man’s*

offence death reigns over the human family ; that this judgment was by one to condemnation. If I were now for the first time to read this part of Scripture, I should be very apt to think I had found an answer to the inquiry, — why is it that at the beginning of life we are subjected to suffering ? It would verily seem that I am here taught by the word of God, that death, with its attendant evils, is brought upon all human beings without exception, and of course upon human beings in early infancy, “*by the offence of one*,” that is, Adam.

Here, however, an objection rises in my mind, and I begin to say, that such a proceeding is inconsistent with the moral attributes of God. But I check myself, and ask how I know this ? I ask too, what other view of the case would be more consistent ? and I anxiously cast my thoughts around for satisfaction. It is clear that infants suffer. According to my present supposition, they are free from sin, and therefore cannot suffer on account of any moral evil in themselves. I cannot think they suffer on account of sins which they will afterwards commit ; or that they suffer for the purpose of preventing sin in after life. And I here give up the opinion that they suffer either on account of being born in sin, or on account of the sin of Adam. Now if I take this ground, how shall I account for the fact that infants suffer ? Suppose I try this method ; that is, — from a dislike to the doc-

trine of our native sinfulness, and the doctrine of imputation, and for the sake of being totally rid of both of them, I take the whole race of man during the interesting period of their early infancy, cut them off from their relation to Adam, degrade them from the dignity of human beings, and put them in the rank of brute animals, — and then say, *they suffer as the brutes do*. But this would be the worst of all theories, — the farthest off from Scripture and reason, and the most revolting to all the noble sensibilities of man. And then the question comes up; why I adopt such an opinion? I find that I have no reason for it but this. I first deny man's native sinfulness, and of course, I deny that infants suffer on any such account. Next, I say, the doctrine of imputation is, in every possible form, altogether unreasonable and absurd, and notwithstanding what the Apostle teaches as to the effect of Adam's sin, I cannot admit the idea that infants suffer, in whole or in part, on *that* account. Now if I regard infants as belonging to the family of human beings, and as treated on any principles which are applicable to such beings, I find myself in a strait, — having set aside the common, obvious reason why human beings suffer and die, that is, their own sinfulness, and the special reason which the Apostle suggests in Rom. v. that is, their relation to apostate Adam, and every other reason, and thus finding myself unable to give any kind of reply to the

question, Why do infants suffer and die? Unwilling therefore to bear the pressure of this question, which is so hard to be answered, I resolve to rid myself of it at once, and say, children in early infancy are not to be regarded as belonging to the human race; they are not treated as human beings, but as brute animals; and so the evils which they suffer, do not come upon them either because they have any moral depravity, or on account of the sin of Adam and their relation to him as the head of the human race, or on account of any thing else which appertains to beings possessed of a moral nature.

I have here in a manner personated one who denies native depravity, and the fatal influence of Adam's disobedience upon his posterity, and who thus forces himself to invent an hypothesis which so ill accords with Scripture and Christian feeling. The fair result of the whole seems to be this. As there are only two things mentioned in the Bible, which bring suffering and death upon human beings, the apostacy of Adam, and their own personal sin; if we deny the native sinfulness of man, or if we deny that infants are in any sense subjected to suffering on that account, we are shut up to the conclusion, that they suffer exclusively on account of Adam's sin, and so that the often repeated declaration of the Apostle, that *death comes upon all, by the offence of one*, is to be understood in the most literal, unqualified sense; or else that infants

suffer and die without any assignable reason whatever.

But there are other ways in which Adam's sin has been supposed to have an influence upon his posterity. I inquire then whether that influence is to be understood in this way ; namely, that *Adam's sin was the occasion of bringing his posterity into life in such circumstances of weakness and temptation, that although they are born without any wrong bias, or any tendency to sin, they will, after a while, be corrupted and fall into sin.* This opinion, which is defended by few at the present day except Unitarians, has been substantially considered in previous chapters. I shall only say here, that it leaves wholly untouched the question ; on what account do human beings suffer before they commit actual sin ? and that it requires a most unnatural and forced construction to be put upon the whole representation of the Apostle in Rom. v.

Again ; I inquire whether Adam's sin affects his posterity in this way ; namely ; that *by a special divine constitution, they are, in consequence of his fall, born in a state of moral depravity leading to certain ruin ; or that, according to the common law of descent, they are partakers of a corrupt nature, the offspring being like the parent ; and that suffering and death come upon them not as personally innocent and pure, but as depraved and*

sinful beings. This opinion is maintained by Calvin, Edwards, Dwight, and Orthodox divines generally. And this is the view of the subject which I consider as more conformable to the word of God and to facts, than any other. As to those who deny the doctrine of native depravity, and the doctrine of imputation, and the doctrine of John Taylor and the Unitarians, and yet profess to believe that we are depraved and ruined *in consequence of Adam's sin*, I am at a loss to know what their belief amounts to. They say, Adam's sin had an influence; but they deny all the conceivable ways in which it could have an influence, and particularly the ways which are most clearly brought to view in Rom. v., and in other parts of Scripture. Is not their belief merely negative?

If I am asked, whether I hold the doctrine of *imputation*; my reply must depend on the meaning you give to the word. Just make the question definite by substituting the explanation for the word, and an answer will be easy. Do you then mean what Stapfer and Edwards and many others mean, namely, that *for God to give Adam a posterity like himself, and to impute his sin to them, is one and the same thing?* Then my answer is, that God did in this sense, impute Adam's sin to his posterity. This is the very thing implied in the doctrine of native depravity. By the doctrine of imputation, do you mean, that

Adam's sin was the occasion of our ruin ; that it was the distant, though real cause of our condemnation and death ? I consider the doctrine, thus understood, to be according to Scripture. Do you mean that we are *guilty*, that is, (according to the true, original import of the word,) *exposed to suffering* on account of Adam's sin ? In this view too I think the doctrine Scriptural. Do you mean, that God visits the iniquity of our common father upon his children, through all generations ? This too accords with the truth. But if the doctrine of imputation means, that for Adam's sin alone, God inflicts the penalty of the law upon any of his posterity, *they themselves being perfectly sinless*, then the doctrine, in my view, wants proof. There appears to be no place for such a doctrine, seeing all Adam's posterity are from the first morally depraved. And if they are allowed to be so, I know not why any one should think that God makes no account of their depravity in the sufferings which he brings upon them. The Apostle does not use the word *impute* in relation to the subject ; but he does teach, in the plainest manner, that the fall of Adam spread depravity and destruction through the whole human race. The particular word which shall be used to express this doctrine, is not essential ; and as the sacred writers do not express it by *imputation* ; why should we be strenuous for that particular word ? Nevertheless, as it is the name which has generally

been given to the doctrine in Orthodox creeds and systems of divinity, and as the word may have a meaning in no small degree analogous to what it has in Rom. 4 : 6; I can see no reason for any great zeal against it. Considering the common meaning of the word, I think it not well adapted to the subject, and have never used it. But Calvin and Edwards and other distinguished divines have used it. The great object is to get a right understanding of the doctrine itself, as set forth in the word of God, and to express it in a just and impressive manner.

Do you ask, whether depravity is *propagated*? my answer is, that *human beings* are propagated, and are propagated *as they are, fallen, corrupt*. "Adam begat a son in his own likeness." This contains the whole doctrine, if likeness includes, as undoubtedly it does, likeness in regard to moral disposition and character. The word *propagated* is not generally applied to depravity, and is evidently not so well suited to the subject, as *natural*, or *native*. But it is neither uncommon nor unscriptural to speak of depravity as coming in the way of natural generation, or natural descent.

Is the depravity of man *constitutional*? The chief objection against the use of this word in relation to the subject before us, seems to rest on the assumption, that the word means nearly the same as *physical*; or at least something opposite to *moral*. But

this assumption is unauthorized. The word, *constitutional*, may relate to the constitution or appointment of God, or to the nature or constitution of man. Now was it not the *constitution* of God, that is, the *principle* or *plan* which he established, that the posterity of Adam should bear his moral image? Is there not, in fact, such a connection between him and them, that condemnation and death were brought upon them by his one offence? And did not God *constitute* this connection? Was it not his appointment, that "by one man's disobedience the many were *constituted sinners*?" And is it not the established order of things, that children, from generation to generation shall resemble their parents as to the substance of moral character? Evidently then the depravity of man takes place *according to the divine institution*; and, in this sense, it is *constitutional*. And is not this a very obvious and proper sense of the word? But the word may also relate to the *nature* or *constitution* of men. And if their depravity is founded in their nature, or constitution, may it not properly be called *constitutional*? I do not now speak of their *bodily* constitution, but of the constitution of their *mind*, their *moral* constitution, their *nature* as *moral beings*. We have a *mental* and *moral* constitution, as well as a *corporeal*. Now if depravity consists in our moral *constitution*, or directly and certainly flows from it; we may in this sense call it *constitu-*

tional, — just as we call it *natural*, because it is founded in our moral *nature*, or flows from it. The word however is not used by us, but by those who differ from us. To discredit our doctrine of *native* depravity, they say that we hold to a *constitutional* depravity. Be it so. Do not *they* hold to the same? They maintain, — certainly the most respectable of them maintain, that *the cause of sin lies in the nature of man, not in his circumstances*. And what is the difference between the *nature* of man, and his *constitution*, whether taken physically, or morally? And what is the difference between their calling depravity *natural*, meaning that it results not from man's circumstances, but from his *nature*, and our calling it *constitutional*, meaning that it results from man's moral constitution? If there are objections against this, there are against that. But there is no need of logomachy. Those who believe human depravity to be *native*, do not think it best to call it *constitutional*, because the word is liable to be misunderstood. They are better pleased with the language of Scripture, or with that which is evidently conformed to it.

On the whole, it is evident, that the words *native*, *innate*, *hereditary*, &c. may all be used to designate some quality or circumstance of man's depravity, with as much propriety, as they can be used in relation to any thing else. They should, however, be well

explained, and most of them should be chiefly confined to systematic theology. The language best suited to the purposes of popular instruction and devotion, is that which is most scriptural. But there can be no reasonable objection against the moderate use of technical or scientific terms in the more elaborate theological treatises. I know indeed, that an opposer of the common doctrine may collect together all the epithets ever used by Orthodox writers, and, by making them up into one overloaded sentence, and by contriving to give them a gross and offensive sense, may excite prejudices against the doctrine, and thus prevent many from learning what the Scriptures teach. In like manner, opposers of the doctrine of election have often labored to make it odious, by drawing out in fearful array a great variety of words which have sometimes been applied to it, and so managing the matter as to give the words a meaning not at all suited to the nature of the subject. But Christian divines and philosophers will easily see the difference between argument, and declamation; between appeals to reason and piety, and appeals to passion and prejudice. What we want on such a subject, is candid, sober, thorough discussion, based upon sound principles of reason, and upon the infallible word of God.

CHAPTER XI.

Every other theory as much encumbered with difficulties as the Orthodox. The spirit of cavilling. Proper influence of the doctrine of native depravity.

It will help us to form a right estimate of the speculative objections which have been urged against the doctrine of native depravity, if we find that all the other views which have been entertained of the state of man are liable to similar objections, and some of them to objections of still greater weight. I think it no difficult task to make this appear. I shall introduce my remarks, by quoting a passage from Whately's Essays on the writings of St. Paul. This writer zealously advocates the Arminian views respecting the purposes of God and the state of man. And yet, with a candor and impartiality which are seldom found either among Arminians or Calvinists, and which, should they generally prevail, would expel the bitterness of controversy from the ministry and the church, he writes thus :

“Before I dismiss the consideration of this subject, (i. e. election,) I would suggest one caution relative to

a class of objections frequently urged against the *Calvinistic* scheme, those drawn from the moral attributes of the Deity ; which, it is contended, render the reprobation of a large portion of mankind an absolute impossibility. That such objections do reduce the predestinarian to a great strait, is undeniable, and not seldom are they urged with exulting scorn, with bitter invective, and almost with anathema. But we should be very cautious how we employ such weapons as may recoil upon ourselves. Arguments of this description have often been adduced, such as, I fear, will crush beneath the ruins of the hostile structure the blind assailant who has overthrown it. It is a frightful, but an undeniable truth, that multitudes, even in Christian countries, are born and brought up under such circumstances as afford them no probable, often no possible chance of obtaining a knowledge of religious truths, or a habit of moral conduct, but are even trained from infancy in superstitious error and gross depravity. Why this should be permitted, neither Calvinist nor Arminian can explain ; nay, why the Almighty does not cause to die in the cradle every infant whose future wickedness and misery, if suffered to grow up, he foresees, is what no system of religion, natural or revealed, will enable us, satisfactorily to account for. In truth, these are merely branches of the *one* great difficulty, *the existence of evil*, which may almost be called the *only* difficulty

in theology. It assumes indeed various shapes ; — it is by many hardly recognized as a difficulty ; and not a few have professed and believed themselves to have solved it ; but still it meets them, though in some new and disguised form, at every turn, — like a resistless stream, which, when one channel is dammed up, immediately forces its way through another. And as the difficulty is not one, *peculiar to any one* hypothesis, but bears equally on all, whether of revealed, or of natural religion, it is better in point of prudence, as well as of fairness, that the consequences of it should not be pressed as an objection against any. The Scriptures do not pretend, as some have rashly imagined, to clear up this awful mystery ; they give us no explanation of the original *cause* of the evil that exists ; but they teach us how to avoid its *effects* ; and since they leave this great and perplexing question just where they find it, it is better for us to leave it among “the secret things which belong unto the Lord our God,” and to occupy ourselves with the things that are revealed, and which concern us practically ; — which *belong* unto us and to our children, “that we may *do* all the words of God’s law.”

In accordance with these candid remarks of Whateley, I expect now to show, that the various hypotheses which have been maintained by different writers as to

man's depravity, are as really open to the pressure of speculative objections and difficulties, as the common Orthodox doctrine. And if this is the case, then it must evidently be a fruitless thing for any one to attempt to rid himself of difficulties, by shifting off the Orthodox doctrine, and adopting some other in its stead. And it will be the dictate of true wisdom to inquire, not what doctrine is free from difficulties, but what is most agreeable to the word of God, and to the results of experience. We shall perceive this to be a matter of great practical importance, when we consider, that the principal reason why a great number of men have rejected the doctrine of native depravity, has been, the force of speculative objections, particularly those which arise from a consideration of the moral attributes of God; and that the principal effort of such men has been, to find out some scheme, which would not be open to similar objections;—an effort which we shall see has entirely failed of success.

I shall now advert to some of the prominent hypotheses which have been maintained respecting human depravity, by those who have denied the common Orthodox doctrine.

One of these is, *that there is in the character of man a mixture of moral good and evil; and that this mixture commences early, and continues through life.* This may be thought to be a very

rational and liberal view of the subject; and as those who adopt it escape some of the difficulties which respect the theory of native and total depravity, they seem to think that they are free from difficulties altogether. But is it so? Are they not met by various texts of Scripture which plainly teach, that the unrenewed heart is entirely destitute of holiness? And do not these texts stand as difficulties in their way? They have also to encounter the difficulty arising from the testimony of the most intelligent and pious men, whose experience and deep inward consciousness confirm the common doctrine of depravity. And finally, their scheme is exposed to as real a difficulty as the common doctrine, in relation to the infinite benevolence of God. For if it is inconsistent with his benevolence, that a race of intelligent beings, who are wholly dependent on his will, should exist from the beginning of life in a state of total depravity; is it not also inconsistent with his benevolence, that they should be found in a state of *partial* depravity? Will a God of infinite power and goodness certainly guard his offspring against total depravity? Why then will he not guard them against being depraved at all? Is not any degree of depravity a great and destructive evil? And how can we suppose that God will suffer so destructive an evil to take place, when he is able to prevent it? Is there no difficulty here? And if you take upon you to say, that God is *not able* to

prevent the depravity of men ; is there no difficulty in this,—that the God of heaven and earth is unable to keep men pure from sin, when he is infinitely wise and powerful, and has the hearts of all men in his hand, and can effectually guard them against whatever would have any tendency to corrupt them?

You cannot avoid difficulties by adopting the opinion that the sinfulness of man, whether partial or total, commences at a *later period*, than what the common doctrine implies. For if we have reason to conclude that the goodness of God will certainly preserve us from being sinners at the *beginning* of life ; why may we not conclude that it will preserve us from being sinners *afterwards* ? Besides this, you will have to encounter another difficulty ; that is, you must contend with the sacred writers, who teach with great clearness, that all men are sinful from the first, and need the grace of Christ to sanctify and save them.

Do you object to the common doctrine, that sinners turn it into an excuse, saying, if God has brought us into existence in such a state, how can we be culpable ? And may not the ground which *you* take furnish as real an occasion to sinners to exculpate themselves ? May they not say, if our Almighty Maker has so formed us, and so ordered our circumstances, that we shall at some period of our

life, certainly fall into sin; then how are we to blame?

Say then, if you will, with Dr. John Taylor, that the consequence of Adam's fall is only this, that we are placed in circumstances which particularly *expose* us to sin and which render obedience difficult; and that we are corrupted by the influence of bad example. The objector is still ready with his questions. Why did the Author of our being, and the Disposer of all our circumstances, place us in such a state of temptation and exposure? If he wished us to be obedient, why did he take pains to render obedience so difficult? If he wished to preserve us from sin, why did he voluntarily *expose* us to it, especially at that early period, when we are incapable of enduring severe exposures, and when he knew how unhappy would be the result? What kind father would willingly subject his children, in the tenderness of childhood, to trials and dangers, for which they are not prepared, and which he knows will be too great for them to endure? Is not God kinder than the kindest of earthly parents? And will he so constitute the whole race of man, and so expose them to the pernicious influence of bad example, and other corrupting circumstances, that certain ruin will ensue,—and all this on account of the one offence of Adam?

Thus if in your treatment of the doctrine of native depravity, you open the door for speculative objections and cavils, you will find a host of them arrayed against every opinion which you are able to advance on the subject. The fact is, that there is no truth in morals or theology, which will not be swept away, if the objections which are urged by worldly men and cavillers are allowed to be valid.

But the theory which may seem to deserve the most particular consideration, is the one which has of late been the subject of discussion in our religious community. If you adopt this theory, you deny that man has any *native sinfulness*, any *original sinful propensity*, or *innate moral depravity*. You maintain, however, that we come into the world with various appetites and propensities which, though not *sinful*, are the *occasions* of sin ; that these appetites and propensities gain strength by early indulgence, and become predominant, before any sense of right and wrong can have entered our minds ; and that, when our moral agency commences, they are an overmatch for our reason and conscience, and in every instance certainly lead us into sin. You hold that we are born in such a state, that we shall sin, and only sin, until we are regenerated ; that we are born destitute of holiness, and of all disposition to holiness, and that we have in our own nature a ground of certainty that

our first moral acts, and all that follow, will be sinful, unless we are born again; and finally that we are brought into these circumstances not by any fault or any concurrence of ours, but in consequence of the offence of Adam. In adopting this scheme, you adopt the leading features of the common Orthodox doctrine, except one; namely; you deny that our native propensity to sin is a *sinful* propensity. You differ also from John Taylor and the Unitarians in one thing, namely, in holding that all the moral acts of men in their natural state are sinful.

My sole object is to show, that your maintaining this hypothesis exposes you to objections and difficulties of nearly the same kind and degree, with those which have been urged against Edwards, and the Calvinists generally. And if this is indeed the case, then any one who adopts this scheme instead of the doctrine of the Calvinists, for the sake of avoiding difficulties, will find himself disappointed.

In the way of objection to the common doctrine, you say; the Apostle does indeed teach that there is a constituted connection between Adam and his posterity, and that his offence brought ruin upon them; but he does not teach what the connection was, nor how it produced such an effect. He does not tell us that a sinful nature is propagated, or that we inherit it from Adam. — Now if it be as you say, that the Apostle does not teach in *what manner* Adam's sin produced

this woful effect upon us ; surely he does not teach that it did it in *the particular manner* which your theory implies. You ask, where the Bible asserts that, on account of Adam's fall, a sinful nature is communicated to us at the beginning of our existence. And I ask, where it asserts that Adam's fall affected us in the manner *you* describe, that is, by bringing us into being with such appetites, and in such circumstances, as will certainly lead into sin as soon as we are moral agents ? If you say, the Bible does not tell *how* it was that Adam's sin affected us ; why do *you* undertake to tell this ? Are you authorized any more than Calvinists are, to point out the *manner* in which Adam's sin had an influence upon us ? Have you any more right than they, to go beyond what is written ?

But you have another objection to the common doctrine. You say, it is totally incompatible with the justice as well as goodness of God, to bring moral corruption and ruin upon the whole human race, merely on account of one offence of their common progenitor, without any fault of theirs.

And is there not just as much reason to urge this objection against *your* theory ? You hold that God brings the whole human race into existence without holiness, and with such propensities and in such circumstances, as will certainly lead them into sin ; and that he brings them into this fearful condition in con-

sequence of the sin of their first father, without any fault of their own. Now as far as the divine justice or goodness is concerned, what great difference is there between our being depraved at first, and being in such circumstances as will certainly lead to depravity the moment moral action begins? Will not the latter as infallibly bring about our destruction as the former? And how is it more incompatible with the justice or the goodness of God to put us in one of these conditions, than in the other, when they are both equally fatal? Do you say, that our natural appetites and propensities and our outward circumstances do not lead us into sin by any absolute necessity? But they do in all cases *certainly* lead us into sin, and God knows that they will, when he appoints them for us. Now, how can God, our merciful Father, voluntarily place us, while feeble, helpless infants, in such circumstances, as he knows beforehand will be the certain occasion of our sin and ruin? Do you say, it is our own fault, if we sin? True. But why does God, who desires our holiness and happiness, place us in circumstances, which will not only *expose* us to this fault, but which he knows will most certainly involve us in it, and so end in our destruction? Do you say, the doctrine of a depraved nature, as held by Edwards and other Calvinists, makes God the author of sin? Even if this were so, (which

however I do not admit ;) still how does your theory help the matter? What difference does it make either as to God's character, or the result of his proceedings, whether he constitutes us sinners at first, or knowingly places us in such circumstances, that we shall certainly *become* sinners, and that very soon? Must not God's design as to our being sinners, be the same in one case, as in the other? And must not the final result be the same? Is not one of the conditions supposed, fraught with as many and as great evils, as the other? What ground of preference then would any man have? Suppose half of the human race should be born in a depraved, sinful state; and the other half, without holiness, and with such appetites and propensities as will be too powerful for reason and conscience to control, and so will certainly bring them into a depraved, sinful state, and that so speedily, that they never exist a single moment, as moral agents, in any other state. Would these last have in any respect the advantage of the former? And if the two conditions supposed are equally calamitous and destructive, then how is it more consistent for God to bring men into one of them, than into the other? And how can it be more easily reconciled with his goodness that he should bring death and condemnation on Adam's posterity on account of his sin, in the way which *you* suppose, than in the way which Calvinists suppose? Let intelligent, candid Unitarians, who do not believe

either of these schemes, say, whether one of them is not open to as many objections, as the other? Do you say, all the feelings of our hearts revolt at the idea, that God gives us a depraved, sinful nature at our birth, and that no man can believe this without resisting and overcoming his most amiable sensibilities? And do not our moral feelings equally revolt at the idea, that God creates us without holiness, and gives us at our birth such appetites and propensities, as he knows will forthwith bring us into a state of depravity? And have we not as much occasion to resist and overcome our amiable sensibilities in this case, as in the other? When you hold that God has so ordered things that we come into existence, destitute of any disposition to holiness, and with natural appetites which will always get the start of reason, and will be quite an overmatch for it when moral agency begins, and which will *certainly* involve us in sin and ruin;—when you hold all this, you are obliged to set aside your amiable sensibilities and all the natural feelings of your hearts, as unsafe guides in such a matter as this,—you are obliged to overcome these natural feelings as really in maintaining this scheme, as others are in maintaining the Calvinistic scheme. Prompted by these natural sensibilities, you make an outcry against the common doctrine, as though it implied something hard and injurious in God's treatment of his creatures. Whose act is it, you say, that gave us this sinful

nature? And how are we to blame for that nature which God created? And whose act is it, we may ask, that brings us into existence destitute of holiness, and with a nature which certainly leads to sin? And how are we to blame for that which, according to the laws of the human mind, invariably and certainly follows from an act of God, or from that state in which he places us without any concurrence of our own?

Do you say, the Calvinistic doctrine implies a *physical* depravity? But your doctrine is much more liable to this charge? Calvinists hold that depravity originally and essentially lies in our *moral* nature. But you hold that it arises altogether from those appetites and propensities which are not moral, but *physical*. Thus you trace depravity to a *physical* source. You make the fatal danger of our condition lie originally in physical appetites.—But you may perhaps think that you can avoid the difficulties of the Calvinistic theory by alleging, that sin comes not in reality from our natural appetites, nor from any external circumstances, as its proper cause, but from our *free will*, and that the acts of this free will are entirely our own, and that we are justly responsible for them. But on the principle which you have sanctioned by your objections against the Calvinistic theory, we may ask; *who gave us our free will?* And who gave us *such* a free will, as would *uniformly* and *certainly* choose

sin? Why did not God make our free will such, or at least place it under the influence of such circumstances, that its choices should be right instead of wrong? Might not God do this without interfering at all with the nature of a free will? Did he not give to the elect angels such a free will, and place it under such influences, that its choices would certainly be right? And does he not so renew the will of sinful men by his Spirit, and so direct the causes which act upon it, that it shall now begin to put forth exercises which are right, and shall finally put forth those which will be perfectly right, and that certainly and forever? And has not God done all this, and is he not continually doing all this, without interfering with the nature of free will? Why then, if God desires our holiness, does he not give us such a will, as shall freely conform to his law? Has not God a free will in directing this affair? And is not his free will attended with omnipotence? And if he had chosen to give us a will to put forth right volitions, could he not have done it? Why then did he not give us such a will? And if he has given us a different will,—a will that *certainly* acts wrong; how does he show his desire for our holiness? And how are we culpable for the acts of such a will, more than a comet is for its erratic motions? Who gave us this erratic will?

Thus it is, as Whateley says; “The difficulty is not peculiar to any one hypothesis, but bears equally

on all?"—And yet I hold that the difficulty is of no avail, and proves nothing at all, except our ignorance.

It will be evident I think from all which has been said, that the speculative objections which have been urged against the fact of our depravity, whether that fact is contemplated in the light of the common Orthodox theory, or of any other, cannot be regarded as of any decisive weight. The spirit of cavilling, from which they originate, would, if permitted to prevail, demolish the whole fabric of religion. See how it poured forth its malignant sarcasms and sneers against every thing sacred, in the writings of Voltaire and other French atheists! See how it operates in the infidels of our own country! With those who indulge this spirit, just and sober reasoning has no influence, and truth becomes a dream. Let Christians then, take care not to give any countenance to it. It belongs not to them. Its proper residence is, *the carnal mind which is enmity against God* — the heart of impiety and atheism.

Be it then your watchful care, candid reader, to guard against that spirit of mind, which shows itself in such objections and cavils, as have been noticed in this chapter. How sharply the sacred writers rebuked this spirit! They saw in their day, that the thing formed proudly rose up, and said to him that formed it, "*why hast thou made me thus?*" The Apostle

regarded this question as the utterance of an impious, rebellious heart. A man who has this spirit of objection may pretend to feel a respect for the perfections of God. But in reality he denies them. He takes a matter of fact, a well known principle in the divine administration, and says, that *it is inconsistent with God's moral attributes*; — which is the same as to say, that *God cannot be a just and good Being, if he does what he actually does*. This is the radical fault of the objector in this case. He ought to learn what God's *character* is, and what is just and right, by learning *what God does*. Whereas he takes upon him to determine, what God can or cannot consistently do, by his own mistaken notion of what is just and right, vainly assuming that God is altogether such an one as himself. A man who acts on this principle, is at war with the divine administration and the divine character.

I am aware that you may make an objection of a more practical kind against the common theory, namely, that it tends to stupify conscience, and to prevent a proper sense of the evil of sin. But in truth, who will be most likely to be deeply affected with the evil of sin, — he that considers it as arising from the innocent appetites and propensities of our physical nature, or he that considers it as originating in the corrupt disposition of our moral nature, — the sinfulness of our heart? What do facts show? Had not

Calvin, Owen, Watts, Edwards, Brainerd, and others of like sentiments with them, as wakeful a conscience, as deep a sense of the hatefulness and inexcusableness of sin, and as active and successful a zeal in opposing it, as those who have denied the native sinfulness of man?

I have another suggestion. Would you test the truth of the different theories which are held on the subject of our depravity? Inquire then, which of these theories most naturally leads its advocates to fall in with the current language of Scripture, and to speak just as the sacred writers do in respect to the depravity of man, and the necessity of his being renewed by the divine Spirit? Which theory leads its advocates to quote most freely the affecting representations of the Bible as to the deplorable state in which the posterity of Adam are born, to give to those representations the most natural sense, and to dwell upon them with the greatest earnestness? To which of the theories is the solemn, impressive language of inspiration most obviously and perfectly adapted? This plain test of truth may, in many instances, turn to great account.

In closing this Essay, I shall just touch upon the proper, practical tendency of the doctrine of native depravity. This can be ascertained only by finding what its influence is upon the minds of those Christians, who seriously embrace it as a doctrine of the

Bible. Go then to one of this number, to one who is intelligent and devout and given to reflection, and inquire what is his manner of thinking on this subject, and the effect which the common doctrine has upon his feelings; and let him speak for himself.

"There was a time," he will say,—"and I remember it with shame and sorrow,—when my heart was full of objections against the doctrine of our native and entire sinfulness. The thought, that God brings us into being in a fallen, ruined state, occasioned me great uneasiness. And my inward disturbance continued, until the Spirit of God, as I humbly trust, subdued my pride, and inclined me no longer to confide in my own understanding, but to submit implicitly to the wisdom of God. First of all, I adopted it as my maxim *to believe whatever God makes known in his word, and to be satisfied with whatever he does in his providence.* I determined to reject no truth, because it transcends my intellectual powers, or because it is attended with speculative difficulties which I cannot solve. I soon saw that the doctrine of man's native and total sinfulness is taught in the Bible, and is confirmed by experience and observation. The habit which I formed of contemplating *the doctrine itself*, as set forth in the word of God, gradually enabled me to dispose of the difficulties attending it very satisfacto-

rily. I have been brought to look upon sin, whether in disposition or in act, upon *sin itself*, wherever found, and in whatever form, and however occasioned, as *an evil and bitter thing, altogether blameworthy and hateful*. Considering myself as the subject of this evil from the beginning of my life, *as born in sin*, and contemplating the outgoings of my depraved, sinful heart in sinful actions, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes. A deep conviction of sin has banished from my mind all philosophical speculations and questions of controversy. My great concern is to obtain deliverance from the power of sin, and to be renewed in the spirit of my mind. I offer daily and fervent prayer to God, that he would sanctify me wholly; that he would increase my faith, and work in me all the good pleasure of his goodness. The belief which I have, that sin is natural to man, and that it extends its deleterious influence through all his faculties, excites me to great watchfulness and unceasing efforts against its subtle and powerful operations, and to a humble reliance on the help of divine grace. Viewing myself as by nature a child of wrath, and as deserving the whole penalty of the violated law, I am led to exalt the infinite grace of God in redemption, and to give glory to the Saviour who bestows eternal life on sinners, even the chief. And when I come to consider, that this utter ruin is brought upon the human family by the offence of Adam, their federal

head, I bow before that righteous Sovereign, whose judgments are unsearchable, with a full persuasion, that all his ways, though past finding out, are perfectly holy, just, and good, and that sin belongs wholly and exclusively to *man*. Without the shadow of a doubt I believe, that what God does in constituting us sinners in consequence of the offence of Adam, he does in perfect consistency with his infinite holiness and goodness, and without the least infringement of our moral agency. I have done with the impious question, *why doth he yet find fault?* or, *why hast thou made me thus?* Who am I, that I should call in question the wisdom or the rectitude of God's conduct? In a word, when I consider that I belong to a race of rebels, that I am "the degenerate plant of a strange vine," and that the heart of every man is like my own, I see that all the world is guilty before God, that no flesh can glory in his presence, and that salvation is wholly of grace."

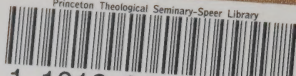
Such are the thoughts and feelings which arise in the mind of a Christian, who is led by the holy Scriptures, and by his own spiritual convictions, cordially to embrace the doctrine of native depravity, and to make it a subject of devout meditation, and who rises above his speculative difficulties, not by a mere intellectual process, but by the power of holy affection. It seems to me exceedingly manifest, that whatever objectors may say, the proper tendency of the doctrine,

when rightly received, is, *to exalt God, to humble man, and to make the Saviour precious.* And happy shall I feel myself to be, if I have been enabled so to treat the subject, as to contribute to this most desirable effect.

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